HARDSHIPS- ILLNESSES

ΔΟΚΙΜΑΣΙΕΣ - ΑΡΡΩΣΤΙΕΣ

GERON PORFYRIOS (†1906-1991) & GERON PAISIOS (†1924-1994)

HARDSHIPS- ILLNESSES-DISABILITIES
HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM AND
THE INNER MEANING OF LIFE

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

ALEXANDROUPOLIS 2012

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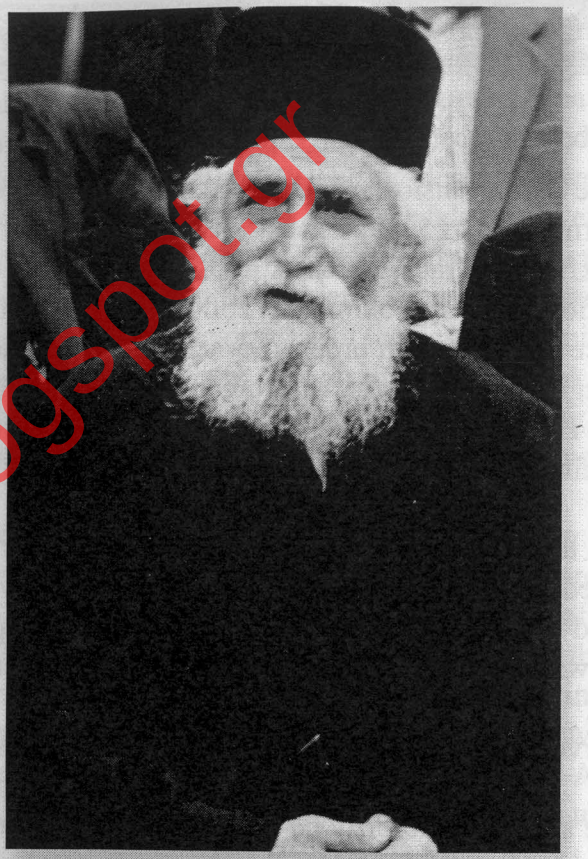

HARDSHIPS – ILLNESSES – DISABILITY

Geron Paisios

"To end up in the sweet Paradise
one must eat a lot of bitter things here,
in order to have the passport of trials at hand"

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BIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

The late Geron[1] Paisios, secular name Arsenios Eznepekidis, was born on July 25, 1924 in Farasa, Kapadokia (in Minor Asia). After the Minor Asia catastrophe, the Hellenic (Greek) population, after approximately 2500 years of continuous presence in the area, in order to evade the persecution and the slaughter by the Turks, was forced to become refugee in today's Hellenic state. The family of Geronda Paisios was settled finally in Konitsa, Ipeiros where he grew up.

From the early age he showed his inclination, as it was predicted for him by Saint Arsenios of Kapadokia, who had baptized him. He lived his childhood with great spiritual fervor, with prayers, fasting and longing for the ascetic life.

He served in the army during the war for four years.

At the age of about thirty he became a Monk in the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos). He faced many temptations. But he had, also, great divine assistance. He strived as an ascetic also in Konitsa, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion. There he was feeding the wild bears by hand. The peacefulness, that the Holy spirit brought in his soul, tamed even the wild animals. "….even the wild animals, when you approach them with love, they understand it and they don't harm you…", he told me once for this incident. Never let us bear a thought, young or old, to imitate his action, because the

1 Geron or Geronda (addressing sb) or Gerondes (plural) is a Hellenic word for a Monk or an Abbot who looks or is of older age and attracts respect because of his spirituality or his position

wildness of the passions we carry within our souls will enrage the wild animals and we will put ourselves in danger.

For about 3 years he went to the desert of Sina in the cave so Saint Epistimis. On Sundays he descended to the Monastery of Saint Catherine. During the whole week, he was struggling alone in the silence of the desert. Every now and then, he was visited by a Bedouin who gave him alms, from the very little he had. Even the water he had was minimal. "… there, in the dryness of the desert, I admired the providence of God. There was an orifice on a rock which dripped, drop by drop, water. There I put a small mug during the whole night and collected my water…. It was enough… I didn't need anymore".

In the desert of Sina, Geron Paisios had many divine experiences but also many apparent confrontations with devil. Generally, I believe that the ascetic strivings of Geron Paisios exceed highly the soft era we live in, with the easy going mentality and its soft people. Geron P. was indeed a great fighter. His struggles can be compared only with the struggles of the ancient Hermits, of the 4th century A.D.

For us, with our soft mentality, it is terrifying even to listen to them!!....

I heard that Geron Porfyrios (Malakasa), in his great humility, had said the following about Geronda Paisio: The gift that Father Paisios has is of greater value, because he acquired it with his struggles, while to me it was donated by God when I was little so I can help people… Such Saints (like Father Paisios) God sends to earth every 400 years!!!...

In the Holy Mountain he lived ascetically and passed most of the years of his life. The gifts with which God Himself had decorated him were many. **He had the gift (charisma) of healing** (healed many with various illnesses, cancer,

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paralyzed by birth, etc.), **had the charisma against demons** (he exorcized demons from many people while he was still alive), **he had the charisma of foretelling** (foretold events that will take place in the future to many people, also predicted developments in the history of our homeland), **He had the charisma of insight** (knew the heart of each individual more deeply and more clearly than the person knew himself, so he counseled correctly and accurately, and everyone listened to the word he needed to hear), **he had the charisma of discretion of the spirits** (knew exactly if a spiritual event was from God or from Satan who was trying to deceive or mislead), **he had discretion,** that is, he knew in every case the will of God and whether it was proper to reveal it or not. He knew what it was good, what it was right in every case. Even for no spiritual matters.

He had theological charisma. From the many spiritual experiences he had with Saints, with angels, with Virgin Mary , but also with visions of the Holy Light, not once but many times, he had become indeed a theologian and knew deeply the mysteries of God.

We will find no end, if we try to count the charismata and the abilities of Geron P. Let us not consider it as exaggeration….. No, it is the reality. It was God who had decorated and honored him with so many charismata. And the gifts of God can be, as God is, endless and unlimited.

From all these charismata of Geron Paisios, the one that mostly impressed me was his love: Boundless love, without hesitation, with absolute self-sacrifice. Love full of fire, sweet, omnipotent, divine. A love emanating from his heart without discriminations, was embracing with the same fervor the good and the bad people, the friends and the enemies, the people who were close to him but also the

strangers, the worthy but also the unworthy, the orthodox but also the heterodox, the human beings but also the animals and the plants, but above all was his love for God. It was not a Humane love. Such love **only** the Holy Spirit may install in a human heart. The human *loves* are so small and gainful, so temporary and fickle, so selfish and oppressive, are transformed so easily to resentment and hate, that it is a shame and injustice to compare it to the love of Geron P.

These charismata, this love of Geron P. is what attracted people near him. Hundreds of people visited him daily in his cell, an endless come and go. Geron P. collected the pain, the agony and the problems of the world and gave back solutions, joy and serenity. Wherever and whenever it was needed-he knew and God knew where-he intervened miraculously with divine authority and gave solution to the unsolvable.

Hundreds of people have stated in writing, by signing with their real name, the miraculous experiences related to Pater P. Relative books have been published. However, those who have not spoken, the events which Geron P. with dexterity was hiding, are many more. Geron P. was a present of God to humanity.

His fame had surpassed the boundaries of Greece. People came to see him, and seek advice from Australia, U.S.A., Canada, Germany, Russia, Romania, France, Africa and all over the world. His fame was worldwide. And all these without even a radio, a T.V., a newspaper or any type of media to even have mentioned something for him while he was alive. They project and magnify only the bad things of the people who are close to church; the good things, the miraculous, the saintly, if they cannot slander them, they ignore them, they convict them to the jail of silence.

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However, …. People have their ways and God has his own. All this fame was spread by word of mouth, from people who were astonished by his benefactions and his miracles …. Geron P. was promoted by God Himself …….

When he descended from the Holy Mountain, to see the women and the invalid who could not go to meet him there, thousands of people visited him to take his blessing. The parked cars at the edge of the road outran the length of one kilometer. There was continuous come and go of cars at the female Holy Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian, in Souroti, Thessaloniki. Thousands of people were benefited.

Thousands were the letters sent to him. "…either psychological problems or cancer or separated families… one of these three were the problems… these are torturing the people today … for these people are writing to me". Pain thronged to Geron P. either in person or through correspondence. And he bore it with self-sacrifice…. willingly. He adopted the pain of others as his own, because he loved people. He did not want, he could not remain an onlooker, while the others were suffering. If it were possible, he carried all the weight of the cross on his shoulders, in order to save a fellow-man.

Geron P., although he healed others, he did not ask God to heal himself….he wanted to exercise patience through sickness. "….to earn some spiritual coins….to save for the old age" he used to say jokingly. Since the time he was a soldier he had still frost bite, he almost had been crippled, and his feet still ached. "It is as though I step on nails…. that's why I place the weight now on the heels, then on the toes, or on the side of the sole of my feet", he told me laughing at this funny side of his behavior… But he insisted not to sit on a pew…. . He went through the vigil standing up. **That way** he taught the young people the fighting spirit.

He had many illnesses and he was undergoing through all of them with bravery and fighting spirit; he despised pain and was mocking it!!..

At one time when he was suffering with hernia, he had tied his belly with pieces of cloth and did not go to visit a doctor. I was worrying and I was begging him to go. Then he described his illness in such a funny and contemptuous manner that I finally burst out laughing.

At the end, in his old age, he got sick with cancer. Myself and many others believe that he asked this from God, in order to enlighten the pain of fellow-men. He had told me <<when you pray for a sick person so as God to heal him, you must pray with such frame of mind, that you can say to God "take from him the disease and give it to me" or at least "give me part of it, in order to facilitate him"… the most Gracious God who sees our weakness heals the patient and to us he does not give anything in return…. sometimes though, He gives…..if he sees that we can bear it…. . However, in order our prayer to be heard, we must have this kind of disposition>>.

This disposition is self sacrifice. Geron P. had this in excess. He wanted and raised with pleasure the pain and the illnesses of thousands of people who visited him. His life was a sacrifice for his fellow-men.

He did not speak about his illnesses. He was hiding them, so as not to worry us or when we perceived it and he could not hide, he presented them as something unimportant. He did so with the cancer. Up to the point he started to bleed and faint.

We all understood that he was ill. We implored him go to the doctors…. nothing… Eh, when the word spread around, the doctors began to come to the Holy Mountain to persuade him to let them examine him. Once a pathologist came, a

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university Professor from Athens, only and only for Geron P. I guided him to the cell. Finally, neither did he achieve anything. Many doctors came but without result.

At the end various high officials of the church pressed him to accept medical care. The Patriarch himself, it is said, to have sent message for his going for examinations.

A doctor, a spiritual man who understood the sensitivities of Geron P., told him that he would not offer him more care than the care he would give to anybody with agricultural insurance. My mind says the sensitivity of Geron P. did not allow him to accept more medical attention than the one that most people had. He considered it as injustice. And it is an injustice and a token of hard heartedness that we people have today. We and our relatives to have the best doctors and to go the best hospitals, while the poor people to be thrown on a miserable camp-bed in a hospital corridor and in more deprived countries babies to die from lack of antipyretics. Injustice- the result of the perverted psychological world of the sinful mankind-exists today everywhere in the world..... however the Divine justice awaits patiently to put matters in order. Amen.

Finally Geron P. was operated for cancer. My mind says that he did it out of obedience, despite his own wish. So and with the manner he faced his illness, he taught us.

When the horrible pain would come, he chanted in order not to cry out and worry the others. He was very sensitive. He did not want to be a burden or to grieve other people.

Someone was praying so that God would give him part of the pain of Geron P. in order to relieve him a little- without saying anything to him. When they were met, before starting any conversation, Gerona P. told him: "Don't ask.... The pains are unbearable... don't ask... you cannot endure them.... Don't demand this from God".

A few days before he passed away, we all came by and took his blessing for the last time. He slept on July 12, 1991 and was buried in the yard of the Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian, in Souroti Thessalonikis.

His grave, today, is a place of public pilgrimage. Whenever I passed from there all these years, there were always people who paid their respects.

Even after his death, Geron P. continues to work miracles not only at his grave, but also elsewhere. I hope that soon documented events that happened after his death, will be published, for God's glory and for the benefit of the mistrustful people of our era who are in a state of great spiritual need and they are not aware of it.

May we all have his blessing!

In memory of my beloved and

Venerable parents Simeon and Evangelias.

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CHAPTER 1

"We went through fire and water…."[2]

The crosses of life's trials

Geronda, the little cross you gave me, I have it on continuously and it helps me with my difficulties.

Yes, such little crosses are our crosses, like the ones we hang around our necks and they protect us in life. What do you think, do we have a big cross ourselves? Only the cross of Christ was very heavy, because Christ, on account of his love for the people, He did not want to use for himself His divine power. Following that, He continues to lift the burden of the crosses of all the people and to relieve us of the pain of life's trials with His Divine help and His sweet consolation.

The good God economizes for every man a cross according to his endurance, not to be tortured, but to climb by means of the cross to Heaven-because in reality the cross is the ladder that leads to Heaven. If we understand what thesaurus we are saving through the pain of our hardships, then we will not moan, but we will glorify God by bearing the little cross that He bestowed upon us, so that we will be happy in this life, but also we are to receive "pension" and "money allowance" in the next. God has secured for us possessions there in Heaven. However when we ask him to rid us of a trial, He gives these possessions to others and we lose them. Whereas, when we exercise patience, He will give us also

2 Psalms 65,12

interest.

It is blessed he who is suffering here, because the more he is tormented in this life, the more he will be helped in the next, because he pays off sins. The crosses of hardships are superior to the "talent", the charismata, that God gives us. Blessed be he who has not one cross but five. A hardship or martyrdom is also a net salary. That's why in every trial we should say: "Thank you my Lord, because that was necessary for my salvation".

The trials help people To come to their senses

-Geronda, I am informed of the hardships of my blood kin, will their suffering ever end?

-Be patient, my Sister, and don't lose your hope to God. As I understand from the hardships that your people are going through, God loves you and allows this suffering for the spiritual cleaning up of the whole family. If we examine in a worldly sense what your family is going through, you seem unfortunate. If, however, we examine them spiritually, you must be happy, and in the next life the ones, who are considered fortunate in this life, will be jealous of you. By this manner, your parents are drilled, since they don't know the kind, the spiritual way or they don't understand it. Anyway, a mystery is hidden in the trials of your home, but also in certain other homes, while so much prayer is taking place! *"Who knows the decisions of God?"*[3]. God may give a hand in order to put an end to their hardships.

-Geronda, is it not possible for the people to come to their senses in another way and not through some kind of hardship?

3 Psalms 35, 7

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-Before God allow a trial to come, He worked with a good manner, but people did not perceived it, that's why He allowed the trial afterwards. You see, when a child is cantankerous, his father tries with a good manner, he does him favors, but when the child doesn't change, then the father behaves with austerity, in order the child to be corrected. So does God sometimes, when someone does not understand with the good manner, he gives a trial, in order to come around. If there were not a little pain, illness etc. people would become beasts; they would not approach God at all.

This life is short and hollow; its duration is short. And it is fortunate it is short, because the bitter events will pass quickly, on account of which our soul will be healed as it happens with the bitter drugs. You see, the doctors, while the poor people are in pain, they give them bitter medicine, because with the bitter they will become well, not with the sweet. What I want to say is that health comes out of the bitter, the same way that salvation of the soul come out of the bitter.

Through pain
Christ is visiting us

A man who does not go through trials, who does not want to be in pain, to be troubled, who does not want others to make him worry or to be administered a rebuke, but he wants to have an easy life, he is out of reality. *"We went trough fire and water, and led us in recreation"*,[4] the psalmist says.

You see, and our Lady also went through pain, and the saints too went through pain, that's why we, too, must go through pain, since it is the same road that we tread. With

4 Psalm 65, 12

the difference that ourselves, when we have a little trouble in this life, we pay off sins and are saved. But even Christ with pain came down to earth. He descended from Heaven, was incarnated, suffered, was crucified. And now the Christian understands this way the visit of Christ, through pain.

When pain visits a person, then Christ visits him. Whereas, when a man does not go through any trial, it is as though God has abandoned him. He neither pays for sins or saves for Heaven. I refer to one who does not want suffering for the love of Christ. He says: "I am healthy, I have appetite, I eat, I enjoy life…." and does not say a "glory thee God". At least, if he recognizes al these blessings from God, to a certain extent his case is settled. "I didn't deserve all these, he should say, but since I am weak, God economizes me". In the biography of Saint Amvrosios[5], it is stated that once the Saint was put up with his companions in the house of a rich person. Seeing the immense riches the Saint asked the owner if he had ever faced any sorrow. "No, never, he answered, my riches are continuously growing, my farms are prospering, neither pain nor illness visited me ever". Then the Saint shed tears and said to his companions. "Get the coaches ready quickly to depart from here, because God has not visited this man". As soon as they got out in the road, the house of the man sank! His well-being was abandonment of God[6].

"The Lord reproves him whom he loves"[7]

-Geronda, why people are suffering today so much?

5 He is commemorated on Dec. 7
6 See the Grand Synaxaristis of Orthodox Church, publ. Mattheou Laggi. Vol. 12, Athens 1980, p. 243-244
7 Prov. 3, 12

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-Because of the love of God! You, as a Nun, you get up every morning, you follow your canon, do the rosary, and do genuflexions etc… For those who live in the world the difficulties they go through are their canon, so they are purified by them. The difficulties offer bigger benefit than the worldly comfortable life, which does not help them either to approach God, or to save heavenly salary. That's why suffering must be accepted as a present from God.

The virtuous God with trials reproves like a good father his children, out of love, out of Godly kindness, and not out of malice, or worldly, legal justice, because He wants them (his children) to return near Him. That is, because He wants to save his creature and bequeath them His kingdom, allows trials in order to make man fight, struggle and pass tests in patience and pain, so devil may not say to Him: "Why do you repay him or why do you save him, since he did not labor?". God is not interested in this life but in the next. First He takes care of the next life and then for the present.

-Why Geronda, God gives to some people many hardships, while to others does not?

-What does the Holy Bible say? *"The Lord reproves him whom He loves"*[8]. A father for example has eight children. The five stay at the house near the father, and the other three go away and they don't think about him. To those who stay near him, if they are naughty, he pulls their ears, he gives them a little slap; or if they are sage, he caress them, gives them some chocolate. The others who live far away, neither punishment nor caress have they. So does God. The people who are near Him and those who have good intentions, if they err a little, God gives them one slap and they pay off or, if He slaps them more they save up for Heaven. For those who are far away from Him gives them longevity, so as to

8 Prov. 3, 12

repent. That's why we see secular people who act serious sins, and despite that they have plenty of material goods, live long, without going through trials. God economizes them, in order to repent. If they don't repent here, they will not be able to defend themselves in the next life.

The pain of God for The hardships of people

So many hardships people have! So many problems! And some come here to tell them to me in two minutes, standing, so as to be counseled a little. A tormented mother told me: << Geronda, there come times that I can't take it any longer and I say: "My Christ give me a short break and then let the torments restart" >>. How much need for prayer people do have! However, every trial is a gift from God; it is a good point for the next life. This hope for recompense in the next life gives me joy, comfort and courage, and I can withstand the pain for the hardships people go through.

Our Lord is not Vaal, but God of love. He is a Father who sees the troubles of His children because of the various temptations and trials they go through and He will reward us , as long as we show patience for the little torment of the trial or rather of the blessing.

-Geronda, some people say: "Is it not harsh what God allows? Doesn't God feel compassion?".

-The pain of God for the people, who are tortured by illnesses, by demons, by barbarians etc. has at the same time and joy for the heavenly reward He has prepared for them. God Having in His mind the reward that whoever goes through trials will receive in Heaven, and knowing what is in stock for him in next life, helps him to *withstand* the pain. He even allowed Herod to commit so many

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crimes[9]. Fourteen thousand babies he slaughtered let alone how many parents, who did not let the soldiers kill their children, they were killed too. The cruel soldiers, in order to show off to their chiefs, they cut the babies to pieces. The more the kids were tortured, the more God was in pain, but also the happier He was for the greater glory they (the babies) were to enjoy in Heaven. He was happy for these little angels, who would constitute the Angelic Order of Martyrs. Angels out of Martyrs!

In sorrows God gives the real consolation

God watches closely the troubles of His children and consoles them as a good Father. Why, what do you think, does He want to see His little child suffer? All his hardships, his crying, He takes them under consideration and later He pays. Only God gives real consolation to sorrows. That is why, a person who does not believe in real life, who does not believe in God, in order not to ask his mercy when he is suffering, he is full of despair and his life has no meaning. He always remains helpless, inconsolable and tortured in this life, but also condemns his soul eternally.

The spiritual people however, because they face all the trials near Christ, they don't have sorrows of their own. They gather the many sorrows of the other people, but in parallel they gather the great love of God. When I chant the hymn *"O entrust me not, to any human protection O most Holy Lady"*, sometimes I stop in *"but do thou accept the prayer of thy supplicant...."*. If I don't have sorrow, how can I say "sorrow hath fettered me, and I am unable to endure

9 See Math. 2, 16

and bear..."[10]. Can I tell lies? In the spiritual way there is no sorrow, because when a person follows the spiritual rules, everything changes. If a person rests the bitterness of his pain on the sweet Jesus, the bitterness and the sorrow turn into honey.

If someone understands the secrets of the spiritual life and the secret ways that God works, he stops worrying for whatever happens to him, because he accepts with pleasure the bitter medicine that God gives him for the well-being of his soul. He considers everything as a result of his prayer, because he asks continuously from God to whiten his soul. When the people, however, face trials in the worldly manner, they suffer. Since God watches us all, one has to surrender *carte blanche* to Him. Otherwise it is an ordeal; he asks Him everything to happen the way he wants, but not all happen the way he wishes, so he does not find rest.

No matter if one is full or hungry, no matter if they praise him or they wrong him, he must be happy and face everything with modesty and patience. Then God will give continuously blessings, until his soul will reach the point of not being able to accommodate or withstand God's goodness. And the more one progresses spiritually, the more he will perceive God's love to a greater extend and he will languish from His love.

10 Troparion of the small and grand supplicatory canon to Virgin Mary: "O entrust me not, I pray, to any human protection, O Most Holy Lady, but do thou accept the prayer of your supplicant. Sorrow hath fettered me, and I am unable to endure and bear the demon's darts; a shelter have I not, neither place to run I, the wretched one. Embattled from all sides am I, and no consolation have I but thee. O Mistress of creation, protection and hope of the faithful do thou not overlook my prayer, do that which will profit me".

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The trials and sorrows With God's concession

The trials that come upon us are sometimes the antibiosis that God gives us for the illnesses of our soul and they help us very much spiritually. A man gets a soft smack and his heart softens. God, of course, knows the status in which everyone is, but, because we don't know it, allows us to be tried, in order to know ourselves, to discover the passions hiding within us so as not to have illogical demands the day of Judgment. Because, even if He ignored our passions and accepted us in Paradise as we are, there too we would create problems again. That is why God allows Satan to create temptations here, in order to brush us up, so as our soul to be humiliated and purified by the sorrows, thereupon He favors us then with His grace.

The real happiness is born out of the bitterness one tastes with joy for Christ, who also tasted bitterness in order to save us. A Christian must be especially happy, when a trial comes upon him, without having given any cause himself.

We say, sometimes to God: "My God, I don't know what you will do, I surrender myself to you carte blanche, to mend my ways". Then God not only tries to mend my ways but to make me superhuman so he allows Satan to come and tease me and give me a hard time. Now, with cancer, I see his ploys and laugh.. Hey you, devil! Yourselves, do you know with what kind of soap devil cleanses man, when God allows the devil to tease him, in order to try him out? With the foam of his evilness! He has got a good ..... soap! As a camel emits foam when it gets angry, so does devil in similar cases. And then he scrubs the man, not to erase his stains and be purified, but out of malice. God also allows devil to rub people, just to get rid of the stains and

be clean. If God allowed devil o rub people the way we rub the clothes, he would tear us apart.

-Geronda, can we say for the various temptations occurring in our life, that it is the will of God?

-No, don't mix up the will of God with the temptation and with what the tempter brings. God lets the devil free to tempt men up to a certain point, and lets men free to do the good or the evil. It is not, though, God's fault for the wrong-doings of a man. Judas, for instance, was a disciple of Christ. Can we say that it was the will of God that he be a traitor? No, Judas himself allowed devil to enter inside him. Someone said to a priest: "Father, please offer a short memorial service for Judas". It was as though he would say: "You, Christ, are unjust; such was your will, that Judas would betray You; that's why now, help him".

Countable are the cases in which God allows some pious people to be tempted, in order for somebody who lives a bad life to come to his senses and repent. These people get double salary. God, that is, gives the capability to some people-who with the trials they go through, they pay off in this life their sins and illogical complains- to be helped by the patience of those, who although they did not sin, they suffer but they don't complain. Let's suppose that a good devout head of a family is at home with his family and suddenly an earthquake occurs and the house collapses, falls down upon the whole family and through terrible suffering they all die. Why did God permit that? So they would not complain the others who are at fault and are punished.

That's why, the people who take under consideration the heavy crosses for the just men, they never worry for their own little trials. They see that, although they acted wrongly in their lives, they suffer less than the just men, that's why they say like the good bandit: "They did not do anything

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wrong and suffered so much; what sort of punishment must we go through?"[11]. Unfortunately, some people look like the bandit who was crucified on the left of Christ[12] and say: "They were going through life with the cross at hand and see what happened to them".

There are also cases- these are very rare- in which God allows out of love great hardships to occur to some chosen fighters, in order to crown them. You see, to Saint Siglitiki, because she was helping spiritually many souls with her admonitions, devil went to hinder her of this task. For three and a half years she remained mute because of her illness[13].

Another time a real imitator of Christ asks a favor from God to forgive the sins of his fellowmen, to acquit them from his just wrath, and him to be punished instead of them, while he was not at fault himself. He is a very close relative to God and this great noble love of His son appeals to God very much. In addition to the favors that God does to him by forgiving the wrong-doings of the others, He allows him to have a martyr's death too according to his demand. At the same time, though, He prepares the best stately Palace in Paradise with even higher glory, because many people had wronged him with their groundless judgment, since they thought that God punished him for his own sins.

The ingratitude for God's love

-Geronda, do the trials always benefit the people?

-It depends on how one deals with the trials. The ones who do not have a good mood, they swear at God, when

11 Luke 23, 39
12 See pr.
13 See Grand Synaxaristis of Orthodox church Vol. 1, p. 145-148

hardships come upon them. "Why does this happen to me? They say. There, somebody else has got so many goods! What kind of God is He?". They don't say "I've sinned", instead they suffer. Whereas the conscientious people say: "Glory to thee God! This trial brought me near God. God did that for my own good". And, while before they never attended, after they begin to attend mass, to confess, to receive Holy Communion. Sometimes in particular God leads the tough ones with a trial to such a point, so that by themselves take a big turn and expiate for the pain they feel for the things they have done.

-Geronda, must we say "glory to thee God", when everything goes well?

-But, if we do not say "glory to thee God" in times of happiness, how can we say it in times of sorrow? However, when somebody is ungrateful, he does not get to know the love of God. The ingratitude is a grave sin. For me is a deadly sin. The ungrateful is not pleased with anything. He complains for everything, everything is bothering him. In my homeland, in Farassa, they use treacle a lot. One night a girl was crying, because she wanted treacle. Her mother- what could she do?-went and asked in the neighborhood. The girl when she got the treacle, she started to cry again. She was stamping her feet and cried out. "Mummy, I want yogurt too". "At this time of the hour, my little one, where can I find yogurt?", her mother answered. "No, I want yogurt". She went, brought her yogurt. The daughter gets it, she starts crying again. "Now why are you crying?", her mother asked. "Mummy I want them mixed". Her mother took them, mixed them up. The daughter starts crying again. "Mummy, I can't eat them like that. I want them separated!". Thereupon her mother started to slap her, and..... the treacle was separated from yogurt.

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That's how, I want to say, many people act sometimes, and then there comes the pedagogy of God upon them. At least we should recognize our ingratitude and we should thank God day and night for the blessings He gives us. That way we will chase the coward devil, who will gather his little demons and will become black smoke, because we will have found, at last, his weak point.

We must compare our trial with the The greater trial of somebody else

The best medicine for our every trial is the greater trial of our fellowmen, as long as we compare it to our own, in order to discern the great difference and the great love God has showed us and allowed a minor trial for us. Then we will thank Him, we will feel pain for the other fellow who suffers more and we will offer a cordial prayer so as God may help him. They cut off, for instance, one of my legs? "Glory thee God, I should say, I have at least one leg, to somebody else they have cut off both". Even if I remain a log, without arms and legs, again I should say: "Glory thee God, that I was able to walk for so many years, while others were born paralytics".

Myself, from the moment I heard that a family man had hemorrhage for eleven years, I said: "What am I doing myself? A secular man himself, having hemorrhage for 11 years, having children, having to get up every morning to go to work, and me not even having completed seven yeas of hemorrhage!"[14]. When I think of the other who suffers so much, I cannot justify myself. However, If I think that I suffer and the others are fine, that I get up at night every

14 Geron Paisios had continuously hemorrhages from his intestine.

half –hour, because I have bowel problems and I cannot sleep while others sleep quietly, then I justify myself if I groan. You, Sister, how long do you have herpes zoster?[15]

-Eight months, Geronda

-You see? God allows this to some people for 2 months, to others for 10 months, to others for 15. I understand the pain is acute. Some reach despair. A secular man, though, who has got herpes for one or two months and because of the great pain he becomes desperate, if he is informed that a spiritual man has got herpes for one year and exercises patience without groaning, then immediately he feels consolation. "Hey, he says, I have herpes for 2 months and reached despair; the other poor man has got it for one year and he does not complain! Myself also I get into mischief, while that man lives spiritually!". Whereupon he is helped without getting any advice!

The sorrows that other people Inflict upon us

-Geronda, when someone endures, according to God, the sorrows and injustices inflicted by other people, does this patience cleanse him of his passions?

-Not only cleanses him! It makes him shine! But of course, is there something superior to that? That is how one can pay off sins. You see, a criminal is beaten up, is put to jail, does there his minor canon and if he sincerely repents, evades the eternal jail. Is this a small thing, paying off with this hardship an eternal bill?

You must bear every sorrow with joy. The sorrows caused

15 Herpes zoster: A contagious disease which causes unbearable pains and various complications in the organism depending on the age of the suffering individual.

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by the people are sweeter than all the syrups which are offered by people who love us. You see, in beatitudes Christ does not say: "blessed be thee, when they praise you" but *"blessed be thee, when they revile you"*[16], and especially *"when they are lying"*. When the blame is unjust, one saves up. While when the blame is just, he pays it off. That's why we have to endure him who bothers us not only without groaning, but feeling gratitude too, because he gives us the opportunity to struggle in love, in humiliation, in patience.

The slanderers, of course, work in cooperation with the little demon. The strong wind, though usually breaks and uproots the sensitive trees which they don't have deep roots; while the ones which they have deep roots it helps them to advance their roots more deeply.

We have to pray for those who speak evil of us, and to ask God to give them repentance, enlightenment and health and not let us have inside us the slightest hate against them. We should keep only the experience from the temptation, throw away all the bitterness and take under consideration the words of Venerable Efraim: *"If It so happens and you are slandered, and thereafter it is proven the purity of your conscience, don't be high-minded, but serve the Lord, who redeemed you of the human slander, with modesty in order not to end up corpse superb"*[17].

16 Math. 5, 11

17 Rev. Efraim of Syria, vol. A, Publ. << To perivoli tis Panagias >>, Thessaloniki 1988, p.253

CHAPTER 2

The disease

The diseases help people

(W)hat does it mean, Geronda, "good Paradise".

-We coax somebody to go to Paradise.

-May it mean, Geronda, "to end up in the good Paradise"

-Have you ever heard anybody talking about a bad Paradise? However, in order to end up in the sweet Paradise, on must eat a lot of bitter things (trslrs note: face bitter events) here, so as to have the passport of trial at hand. What happens in hospitals! What tragedies! What pain people go through! How many mothers, poor things, undergo operations, thinking of their children and having the agony of the whole family in mind! How many family men have cancer, go through radiation therapy and what trouble they are in! Not being able to work, to have to pay rents, to have a lot of expenses! Other people although they are healthy, again they cannot make ends meet, so much worse for someone who is ill and is hard for him to work, in order to meet somehow his obligations! These problems of the people have overcome me very much. So many things I hear everyday! Continually, hardships, difficulties!.... Bitter all day the mouth and in the evening I go to bed, without eating, to rest a little. I feel physical exhaustion, but also internal rest.

-Geronda, is an illness always beneficial?

-Yes, it always benefits us very much. The illnesses help

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people to "be propitiated"[18], when they don't have virtues. Health is a great thing, but the good an illness offers, health cannot give! Spiritual good! It is a high benefaction, very high! It cleanses man from sin, and sometimes secures also salary for him. The soul of man is like gold and a disease is like the fire which cleanses it. You see, even Christ said to Apostle Paul: *"My power is made perfect in weakness"*[19]. The more one is troubled by an illness, the more is cleansed and becomes blessed, provided he exercises patience and accepts the illness with joy.

Some illnesses require only little patience, and God allows them, in order people to get a small salary, and in order God to remove from them some flaws. That way the bodily illness helps the healing of the spiritual illness. God exploits everything for the good! Whatever he allows is for our spiritual benefit. He knows what each one needs and gives us an illness, either to reward us, or so we can pay off sins.

The heavenly salary out of the illness

-How is your mother?

-She is not well Geronda. At times, she raises high fever and then loses herself. Her skin gets full of sores and during the night she is in pain.

-You know; those are martyrs; if they are not fully martyrs, they are by half.

-Her whole life too, Geronda, was a hardship.

-Consequently her salary will be double. So many blessing

18 The meaning of "propitiation" in Orthodox theology has no the legal character of the western theology, but expresses the philanthropic pedagogy of God for the sinner, with the aim to be saved

19 B' Corinth. 12, 9

she is to get. Paradise is guaranteed for her. When Christ sees that someone withstands a serious illness He allows it, so that with a little hardship on earth she may be rewarded in Heaven, in eternal life. She suffers here, but she will be rewarded there, in the next life, because there is Paradise, and there is reward

Today a nephritic, who for years now goes through hemodialysis, told me "Grandpa, please make the sign of the cross over my hand. My veins are full of wounds and I cannot do hemodialysis". "those wounds , I told her, in next life will be diamonds of greater value than the diamonds of this world. How many years do you undergo hemodialysis?". "twelve", she told me. "So you are entitled a "gratuity" and a diminished pension", I told her. Then she shows me a wound on the other hand and tells me, "Geronda, the wound does not heal; the bone is sticking out". "Yes, but from inside there Heaven can be seen, I tell her. Come on, have patience. I wish Christ to increase His love to you, in order your pain to be forgotten. Of course, there is also another wish the pain to be obliterated, but then the high salary will be obliterated too. Therefore, the first wish is better". The poor woman was comforted.

When the body is tried out, then the soul becomes blessed. With the illness our body is hurt, our soil-built house, but this way its landlord, our soul, will rejoice eternally in the heavenly little palace which Christ is preparing for us. With this spiritual logic, which is illogical for the secular people, I rejoice myself too and take pride in the bodily damage I have. The only thing I don't consider is that I will have heavenly reward. I understand that I pay off my ungratefulness to God, since I have not responded to His generous donations and benefactions. Because in my life everything is revelry; the monastic life and the illness I go

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through. So many charities God does provide me, so many dispensations. Wish, though, not to pay me off in this life, because then woe is me! Christ would do me great honor if he provided me with greater suffering for His love, as long as He strengthened me so I could withstand it, and then not salary want I.

A man when he is in perfect health, he is not well. It is better to suffer of something. I was not benefited so much by all the ascetic exercise I had done until then, as much I was benefited by the illness. That's why I say, if one has no obligations, it is better to prefer illnesses to health. With health he is a debtor, while with illness, when he goes through it with patience, he is entitled to receive. When I was in the commune[20], a Holy Episcope once had come, very old, named Ierotheos, who was a Monk in the skete (hermitage) of Saint Anna. At the time he was leaving, as he tried to ride the animal, his trousers were pulled up and his swollen legs appeared. The fathers who went to help him saw them and they were appalled. He perceived this and told them: "These are the best gifts that God gave me. I beg Him not to take them away from me".

The patience in times of pain

When an illness comes upon us, it is better to let ourselves in the hands of Christ carte-blanche. We should consider that our soul has greater need of patience and doxology while in pain than when we have a body of steel with which we can do great bodily struggles, which struggles, though, may lead us to boasting, without being aware of this, because we will think that we will gain Paradise with our own powers.

20 Geron P. was an ascetic in the Holy Monastery of Esphigmenou from 1953 till 1955.

Do you know for how many years I have sometimes tolerable pain and sometimes intolerable? The tolerable is a permanent condition. How much I suffered first from the bronchectasia and then from the operation I went through! Then, the story with my intestines started. Afterwards, for half a year, I suffered of discopathia; I was in a lot of pain. I could not continue to do genuflexions, but I also had difficulty in taking care of myself, while I had to serve the people who were coming. Next, something hard appeared in my belly; they told me that it was hernia. When I was getting tired, it got swollen and ached very much. One day, in Saint Panteleimonos Eve, it was swollen and ached. I had to go to the Skete though, for the vigil. I said: "I will go no matter what happens", because I had to go. During the vigil I thought to sit for awhile, but I said "if I put down the pew to sit, everybody will do the same", therefore I chose not to sit at all. After the twelve hours that the vigil lasted, I assumed that my hernia would have deteriorated a lot! When I returned to my cell, as soon as I had entered it, the bell started to toll. "Hey Father, open up!", I heard somebody shouting. I started to laugh. "All right, I said, now this will go on and on". Indeed, after awhile others came and then others and others. In the evening, when I finished with the people, my hernia had disappeared completely! The next day, although I had rested, it appeared again! After that it was an obstacle and I was in pain, but I even took pride in it. As long as Christ knew about it, He knew that He was helping me too, that is why He allowed it. This lasted for five years. Do you realize the difficulty?

-And another time, Geronda, that you had a problem with your leg?

-That was another thing. I could not stand erect. When people were coming, I was under pressure. When I recovered

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from this, hemorrhage started. "Ulseric colitis", they told me. Another story… . For seven years with hemorrhage, pain… , but don't worry, pray only for the well being of my soul. I am glad that God honored me by giving me this present which I don't want to be deprived of. Thank God; God allows it, so as I may be helped this way. That is how we give examinations in patience. Now this, later something else…. *"..for you have need of endurance"*[21]. Because if we, who have a little fear of God, are not patient, what are the secular people are going to do? Although, I see that many laymen surpass us in virtue. My parents used to tell me that the Farasians, when they got sick, did not hurry to go to Hatziefenti[22] in order to treat them. They put up with the pain at first, as long as they could, depending on their dutifulness and patience, because they considered it as blessing to suffer, "let me torture , they said, a little my soul in the name of Christ, since Christ was tortured so much in order to save me". When they realized that their affairs did not progress and their family was troubled, then they would go to Hatziefenti to cure them. You see what sense of honor they had! If they, who were laymen, thought that way and exercised patience, myself as a monk how ought I to think? Christ said: *"By your endurance you will gain your souls"*[23]. You see, God was not pleased as much by the charity of Job when he had all the wealth, as by his patience at the time of trial.[24]

-Geronda, when you say that a sick person suffers pain with patience, do you mean that he does not show at all that he is in pain?

21 Hebr. 10, 36
22 That's how the Farasians called Saint Arsenio of Kapadokia.
23 Luke 21, 19
24 See Old Testament, Job

-As a last resort one may allow the others to realize it. He may say he is in pain, but not to what degree. For, if he does not make it known to others at all, they may be scandalized by some of his behavior. If, for instance, a monk suffers of something and he cannot go to mass, somebody who has no good thoughts may be harmed.

Coping with pain

-Geronda, which pain you consider unbearable?

-The pain that causes tears to come out of the eyes! These tears are neither of repentance nor of delight; what category do they go under? What do you think?

-Isn't it a martyrdom, Geronda

-Of course, it is martyrdom.

-Geronda, when I have a strong pain, I have difficulty to say "glory thee God".

-Why do you have such a difficulty? You should think of what Christ went through. Beating, censure, whipping, crucifixion[25]! And He suffered all these patiently, *"being sinless"*[26], for our salvation. And you, when you are in pain you must say: "For your love my Christ, I shall endure it".

-Geronda, what is needed to surpass pain?

-Bravery, force is necessary.

-And how can one cope with unbearable pain?

-If he is secular, by singing, if he is a spiritual person by chanting…. My father once had fever and strong headache. What does he do then? He takes and eats a salty sardine, drinks a glass of wine, and starts singing "wake up poor raya" and other sons of kleftourgia and became well! So we should chant to mock the pain! One day myself, I got a cold and

25 Math 27, 26-44; Mark 15, 15-32; Luke 23, 23-43; John 19, 1-23
26 See Isaiah 53, 9

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had such headache, that I thought my head would explode. I started then to chant a nice psalm and my headache went away. Indeed, the psalmody together with prayer helps a lot in these cases; it softens the soul, it sweetens it, because the incessant sorrows and pains overcome the soul and become the cause to get frozen. Even last night I could not sleep, because of the pain. I told myself that, if the morning does not find me alive, then I will have …a great day. In the next life it will never get dark, nor will day ever break…. Then I took … a pill; I chanted *"the grief of the saints…"*[27]. This … pill lasted all night! Do the doctors have such a pill here?

-Geronda, people say that the pain at night gets stronger.

-Yes, man grows worse at night. Moreover during the day, because the patients have company, chat, etc. they forget pain. At night when they are alone, their mind concentrates in the pain and they think that the pain increases. In sickness, pains will exist, but the aim is to turn the knob to another frequency, in order to forget ourselves, because if you don't handle pain the right way, you will feel the pain twice as much. If you think of the pain, it will become double. Whereas with a good thought, for instance if you remember those who are suffering more than you do or if you chant a little, the pain is forgotten.

-Geronda, the pain usually warns you that something goes wrong in the organism. After that, how much attention must one pay to it?

-One must try out his endurance and to take care of himself accordingly. Especially, as the old age comes, one ought to be careful, because an old car, if it continues to run at the same speed which used to run when it was new, the wheels will come off here, the carburetor will fail there… . At the

27 Recessional hymn of the 40 Martyrs. They are commemorated on March 9.

time when my waist was in pain, I could not do the rosary standing. When I realized that it improved a little, I got up and I did the rosary standing and also did big genuflexions, as a result I got the pain again. Then I said: "Let me try again". Again the same; I felt pain. Then I did not continue, but I had my thought rest in peace.

-A pain, Geronda that I know it does not have a side effect on my organism, does not worry me. But one which shows that there is a serious physical harm, worries me.

-Look, the pain e.g. of the waist may not have an effect in the organism, but it immobilizes the body, while the other pains the body can withstand them.

-Geronda, when the body suffers, does the soul suffer at the same time?

-When the driver is sick, the car cannot run. The soul suffers when the body is in pain. Do you understand? The soul is not in the same mood which prevails when the body is well. The soul gets sick in a way.

-Geronda, does the pain make a man go wild?

-When a man does no cope with pain spiritually, he may run wild. But when he does so spiritually, he becomes calm and is consoled divinely. Then, the illness becomes a feast. One is happy, because he will join the Avowers and the Martyrs. The saintly Martyrs they forgot the pain, because their love for Christ was greater than the pain and it counteracted it.

-The one who does not deal with pain spiritually, is he not purified?

-The secular man is, not the monk though.

Sharing the pain of others

When a man feels pain for his fellowmen, God in some way is deeply touched, He rejoices, because this man, with

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the love he possesses, is related to Him, so He provides him with divine comfort. Otherwise, man would not be able to withstand the pain for his fellowmen.

-Geronda, how can you feel the pain of others?

-When you have a pain also, you think of the pain of the other, you come to his position and feel more pain for him. Your pain, that is, helps you to understand the pain of others. In addition, when you accept your pain with joy, you give solace to others who are in pain.

However, it is one thing to be informed that someone got sick and another thing to get sick yourself. Then you realize what it means to be sick. I heard about "Chemotherapies" and I thought it was "chymotherapies" (trnslrs note: chymos in Greek means juice), that is, they offer treatment to cancer patients with juices-with natural foods! How could I know? Now however, I understand what a hardship it is.

-Are chemotherapies, Geronda, more difficult than radiations?

-More difficult? All these, and the radiations and the chemotherapies are…. The worst is that that they cut off your appetite; while you must eat well, you cannot eat at all. And the doctors tell you: "You must eat". Eh, how can you eat, when all these they cut off your appetite and make you a corpse! When I went through radiotherapy, while I was burning, I could not drink even a drop of water. I felt like vomiting, I felt nausea even thinking of water[28].

-Geronda, if you had done a little earlier the operation….

-Why earlier? Myself, I don't pray for the illness to go away, because that way I sympathize with the people who suffer. I understand much better the ones who suffer and take part in their pain. Besides, this benefits me spiritually.

28 They were said on June 1994, one month before the death of Geron P., which occurred after the eight –month hardship caused by cancer.

The only thing I ask is to be able to be self-served and to be able to serve others. Whatever God wants, though.

When you have a health problem and this does not bother you, then you have in a way the right to pray to God to improve the health condition of others. But and whoever does not have a pain of his own, let him at least feel pain for those who are suffering. "Let me take your gatadokko", the Farasians used to say, that is, your pain, your torment, your bitterness.

-Geronda, which manner they took it with?

-With love. When one says with love "let me take your pain" he takes it. However, if he takes it, then a lot of patience is required, a lot of courage and a lot of strength to cope with it. Some people come and tell me: "Geronda, I want to take your pain". Some they say it out of braveness, but some cowards they don't know what they are saying. These ones with the slightest thing, they run to the doctors and get easily disappointed. They cannot bear their own little pain and they say to take my pain! It is better to exercise patience for their pain, to accept with joy whatever God allows for them and not to ask out of so called love, to take the illness of somebody else. Because, if God by chance satisfies their request and they have forgotten that they had asked for it themselves, they will complain and they may even turn against God.

Ministration of patients

-Yesterday evening, as I was going to church for a vigil, I saw a father standing aside with a child on a wheelchair. I approached, embraced the little one and kissed him. "You are an angel, I told him, do you know that?" And to his father: "It is a great honor for you to serve such an Angel. Be happy, because both of you will go to Paradise". Their face shined with joy, because they felt the divine consolation.

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Those who serve ill people, invalid people etc. with love and patience, if they have sinned, their sins are wiped out with the sacrifice they offer; if they don't have sins, they become blessed. Once, a woman narrated to me some very miraculous events from her life. I was surprised, because they were conditions we encounter in the biography of Saints and she was an ordinary woman. When she told me how she had lived most of the years of her life, I realized that her life was a sacrifice. Since she was young she served sick people, because in her parents' house they had the Grand Father and Mother who were ill. When she got married, she lived with her Father and Mother in law who were also sick. Afterwards her husband got sick, he lived confined in bed and she looked after him. Her whole life of that woman passed serving ill people. She had great desire all these years to study, to go to vigils, but she didn't have time. Since she was justified, God gave her His grace all together at the end.

-Geronda, some people, when they get sick, acquire many caprices.

-Yes, this happens, but the healthy ones must justify a little the anxiety, the whining or the peculiarity of the ill, because this is natural to the sick people. Especially one who has not become sick cannot understand an ill person, because he has not gone through pain and his heart is a little harsh.

The ones who serve an ill person, a bedridden, it is necessary to pay a lot of attention in order not to make him moan. They may serve him for years, however, if they make him moan once at the end, they lose everything. It is very grave for a soul to leave this world moaning. But those (who served him) the Satan will torture afterwards, by sharpening supposedly their conscience.

-Geronda, when you serve an ill person, it is not only the

fatigue that wears you out, but also the sadness, because you see one of your own people little by little to pass away.

-Yes, but God also economizes them! You see, when a member of a family gets sick, the whole family suffers. And if by chance it is the father and he cannot work, the whole family and suffers and becomes poor. They are in agony, "will he live, or not?". He is suffering, and so do all the others. He dies, the people around him die too (literally). The mother too must work more, she must take care of the children, go to the hospital, look after the sick man. What I mean is that when someone gets sick of a serious illness, not only himself suffers, gets tired and wants to rest in peace, but also his own people who serve him are in distress, suffer and get tired. And the more close and loved are between them, the more God allows at the end, the ill person and the ones who serve him to have a hard time and feel pain until they reach the point to say: "let God take him away, so he may rest in peace" -but also the family members to be relieved. You see, when a family is very close, and the parents die all of a sudden, without getting sick, and they don't suffer either themselves or their children because there was no need to serve them, the pain of separation for the children is very bitter.

-Geronda, how much the psychological factor can affect the bodily health?

-When one is psychologically well, the physical pain becomes lighter. When one is not psychologically well, the bad psychological condition aggravates his health. Consider a patient with cancer whom the doctors have given up. If he believes in God and finds himself in a joyful, spiritual atmosphere, he may live longer, otherwise he may be worn out by worry and pass away within a few weeks. Sometimes one may be healthy from a medicinal point of view, the

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medical examinations may not show anything wrong, but if he has something that wears him out psychologically, then, he is not really well. Because most of the diseases start from worrying. All people have a sensitive point. A worry will hit one in the stomach, another in the head.

The best medicine for a disease is the spiritual joy, because it scatters the Divine Grace to one's soul. The spiritual joy has the greatest curative power for all illnesses. It is the Godly ointment that heals the injuries, while the worries inflame them.

The suffering of a patient and his confidence to God

-Geronda, if someone has a serious disease and decides to entrust himself to God, is he doing the right thing?

-As long as he doesn't have any obligations, he can do whatever he likes. If he has, though, this will be dependent also upon the others. Myself also I went to doctors "unwilling and not willing"... If I didn't go for this "simple examination" that the doctor suggested, my intestine would be blocked completely. Then I would drink a few liquids only and after that, the end would come. "A simple examination" he told me , and then I entered such a circle... Axial tomographies here, cardiologists there, now the leucocytes went down, then they went up, cutting, patching... and finally what was the outcome? The way it goes, I will remain here....

We usually say: "The diseased, firstly, should be helped humanly and in whatever they can't be helped humanly God will help". But we must not forget that the people who suffer of a serious disease they pass great hardship, a whole martyrdom, when they are helped humanly. They

must go through a lot of medical examinations, operations, transfusions, chemotherapies, radiotherapies. Pricking for blood transfusions, pricking for serums.... The veins to rupture, feeding them through the nose, not being able to sleep.... And all the above, in order to be done whatever is humanly possible. Do you understand? It is not something simple, as it is for instance for an injury that developed pus and must rupture, in order the pus to come out, and then everything is going to be all right. Here all these are a whole procedure. That's why we must not relax and say "all right, this patient fell in the hands of good doctors", but we should take under consideration that, in order a patient to be helped medically, he must go through a whole hardship and we should pray with pain so as Christ may give him patience and guide the doctors, because they make mistakes, especially if they don't have humility.

You see, when the house is in ruins, the landlord of the house cannot stay in. In the same way the landlord of the body, the soul cannot stay in, if its house is in ruins, that is the body. And now they try to keep the landlord in the house with the iron, with...the steel, with vitamins A, B, C...., to help, that is, the ill people scientifically, but they are not helped all of them and, with the help they are offered, simply their life is extended with pain, it is extended rather the pain; because science alone is not enough. It is needed faith also and prayer. Sometimes I see even here in the monastery Sisters who are doctors to try rather with science to help a patient than with confidence in God and with prayer. However the cordial prayer will give them superior medical diploma, because it will stop the human science. When love is exercised with the pain generally for all the people, then the divine powers are activated, as long as there is deep humility in the soul, in order not to show pride

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and be unjust towards God, by thinking that these powers are its own (of the soul).

We must not forget that Christ may cure even those who are not healed by doctors, but there must be a serious reason and the patient must be very faithful and very much devoted to God.

-That is to say, Geronda, when people suffer, should they not ask for medical help?

-I don't mean that, my boy! I don't say "don't give him oxygen, for example", so as the man to suffocate. I want to say, how much the ill person does suffer in order to be helped humanly, and that we must pray to Christ to help the sick people, so as not to suffer. If something is serious, we should pray to Christ to take it away with one caress of His. Because Christ, just a little if He caress the hand of the patients, everything goes away and they become well! Neither are drugs needed then, nor bitterness. And if He caress them on the face, it is even better. In addition if He embraces them, their heart will be softened too! Do you understand? Great faith, though, is required. If a patient has no faith, he does not get well.

Sick children

-Geronda, this sick child, whom his parents brought here today, suffers very much.

-Eh, little by little he will get over his disease, but there will remain some kind of sensitivity in order to remember his illness, and this sensitivity will help him spiritually.

-And the kids, Geronda, who have of leukemia they suffer very much.

-These kids are helped a lot by the Holy Communion. Many children got over their disease with the Holy Communion.

When we read the 145th Psalm[29], through which we ask God to stop the hemorrhages, we should pray so that God may help the kids who have leukemia, but also so that blood may be available in the hospitals for the children who have thalassemia. These children go through martyrdom greater than the one the infants, who were slaughtered by Herod, went through[30]. The little children have net salary from the suffering of the illness, because they don't have sins. How many little children aren't we going to see in next life being together with the martyric, Angelic battalion of those infants! Two-month-old babies to be operated, to be given injections and serums! How can they find veins in the poor things! To prick them from here and there… To see a little kid who has cancer in the head, to go through radiotherapy, to put some chords in such a tiny head. Even an adult cannot bear it, how the little kids can do it!

-These little kids, Geronda, are they cured finally or they die?

-Eh, many of course die, but how can their parents abandon them?

-Geronda, is it worth the pain for Pediatricians to try to keep alive the prematurely born babies?

-The doctors must try their best and at the same time to pray for them, "my God, they should say, if this kid is to live and suffer all his life, then, I entreat You to take it near You". They should make certain, though, that these kids get baptized, and then they will be welcomed in Paradise with a big candle alight.

Also, when the kids are older, the doctors must be very careful how they will make known the diagnosis. To an

29 Saint Arssenios of Kapadokia used to read the 145th Psalm for this case.

30 See Math. 2, 16

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eight-year –old child the doctor said: "you will become blind". His father comes and tells me in front of the child: "we took him abroad for check ups and they told us that he is going to be blind". Even if the child is healthy, the worry can strike him where he has sensitivity, let alone if he is ill!

The sacrifice for the well being of a patient

If we ask something from God, without sacrificing something, it has no worth, If I restk and say: "My God, please, make the so and so healthy", without doing some kind of sacrifice, it is as though I'm saying kind words. Christ will perceive my love, my sacrifice, and then he will fulfill my request, if of course this is for the spiritual benefit of the patient. That's why, when people ask you to pray for someone who is sick, you should tell them to pray themselves also or at least to strive in order to cut down on their defects.

Some people come and tell me: "make me well; I heard that you can help me". They want, though, to be helped without making any effort themselves. You tell someone, for example: "Don't eat sweet things, make this sacrifice, in order God to help you", and he tells you: "Why? Can't God make me well?". They don't make a sacrifice for themselves, let alone to sacrifice themselves for another. Another man does not eat sweets, in order Christ to help those who suffer of diabetes, or does not sleep, in order Christ to give a little sleep to those who suffer of insomnia. That's how a man is related to God. Then God gives His Grace.

Myself, when someone tells me that he can't pray for someone of his family who is ill, I tell him to make a sacrifice himself too for the ill person. Usually I tell him to do something that will be good and for his own health.

Once, a father came to my hut from Germany, when his little daughter had started to be paralyzed. The doctors had given her up for dead. He was completely desperate the poor man. "Make a sacrifice yourself, I told him, for the health of the child. To do genuflexions, you can't, to pray, you can't, all right. How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?". "Four and a half packs", he told me. "Start smoking one packet, I tell him, and the money you would give for the rest, give them to a poor man". "My child to become well Father, he told me, and then I will stop smoking". "Eh, then it will be of no worth; now you must quit smoking; throw away the cigarettes, I tell him. Don't you love your daughter?". "Me, don't I love my daughter? I jump off the fifth floor out of love for my child", he tells me. "Me, I don't tell you to jump off the fifth floor, but to get rid of the cigarettes. If you do such a foolish act and throw yourself off a fifth floor, you are going to leave your child destitute and you will lose your soul. I tell you to do something easy. Here, throw away the cigarettes now!". In no way he wanted to throw them away. And finally, he went away like that, crying! How can this man be helped? While the ones who listen to me and cooperate, they are helped.

Another day, one came puffing and blowing because of walking. I understood that he smoked a lot, and told him: "Hey, blessed man, why do you smoke so much? Something bad will come upon you". As soon as he stopped panting and was able to speak, he told me: "My wife is very sick in the brink of death. Please, pray for her, so as a miracle to occur. The doctors gave up on her." "Do you love your wife?", I asked him. "I love her", he answers. "Then, why don't you do something yourself to help her? She did what she was able to, the doctors tried everything they could, and now you come here to tell me to do something myself, to pray,

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so as God may help. Yourself, though, what have you done to help her?". "What can I do myself, Geronda?", he asks me. "If you quit smoking, I tell him, your wife will become well". I thought that, if God sees that it is not spiritually beneficial for the woman to become well, at least he will save himself from the bad effects of smoking. One month later he came cheerful to thank me. "Geronda, I stopped smoking and my wife became well". After a period of time, came again very upset and told me that he started smoking secretly and that his wife got seriously ill again. "You know now the medicine, I told him. Stop smoking".

The prayer for the ill people

-Geronda, they asked us to tell you to pray for a sick kid and they asked if he will become well. What should we tell them?

-Tell them: "Geron Paisios will pray. Christ loves the kid and He will do whatever is best. If He sees that the child, when he grows up , he will become a better person, He will listen to his prayer. If He sees though, that later the child is not going to be in a better spiritual state, then, because Christ loves him, He will take the child near Him". "Ask and you will receive"[31]. But God will give me, if I am given to God; otherwise, what will He give me the life for, in order to get away? Myself, I am glad no matter if a patient gets well, or dies.

-Geronda, is it good to pray for our health?

-It is better to ask God to set us free of our passions. That is, to ask first the kingdom of God. If we ask God to make us well, we waste the heavenly fortune. However, if we cannot bear the pain of the disease, then we should beg God

31 See Math 7, 7 Mark 11, 24 Luke 11, 10 & John 16, 24

to cure us, and He will act accordingly.

-Geronda, if one is to be helped by the prayer we do, does it depend upon what the patient himself asks from God?

-The patient, if he asks from God to make only him well, and he doesn't pray to become well the other sick people also, he is not doing well. You, Sister, when you were in the world and worked in the hospital, what did you do, when a sick person could not say the Jesus prayer?

-I used to say it myself, Geronta.

-O.K. you, but the patient should also say some kind of prayer.

-He also was saying "oh, my God" or "my Lady, save me". However, Geronda, isn't endurance of pain a kind of prayer?

-Yes, bravo! This is also correct! You, when somebody asks you to pray, because in this certain day he will undergo operation, you should pray from the moment he asks for it. Don't wait, until the time he will enter the surgery, to pray. During a service also, when the priest says *"for those lying in sickness"*[32] you should say with pain "lord have mercy". If you do in octave, "vou…", in order to say "Lord have mercy" musically, your mind will be in the "vou…" and in the "tune", while the poor patients who suffer they will await from you a little help! They have their pain. You, who have no pain, pray for them in so they can be helped. Since you don't sigh in bed (trslrs note: because of sickness), at least leave a sigh while in prayer for them. If the healthy ones don't pray a little for the ill, Christ will tell them someday: << *You were healthy and didn't you pray for those who suffered? "I don't know you…"*>>[33].

If we don't pray for the ill, the illness will follow its natural

32 See Orologion to Mega, midnight service, P. 24
33 Math. 25, 12

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course while, if we pray, it may change its course. That's why you should always pray for the ill people.

CHAPTER 3

Disability is a blessing from God

The right way to deal with disability

-About disability, Geronda, may it cause inferiority complex?

-This is nonsense.

-To the invalids though, Geronda, this happens sometimes.

-It happens because they don't take a right stand. When they understand that disability is a blessing from God, they adopt a right position and they get rid of the inferiority. When a kid has some kind of disability and has not been helped, so he may be happy for his invalidity, then he has extenuation if he feels inferiority. But if he grows up and the inferiority remains, that means that he has not understood the inner meaning of life. To a little girl, when she was nine years old, there appeared a tumor in one of her eyes and the doctors removed that eye. The children in school were making fun on her and she was suffering, the poor girl. Her father came to my cell and told me his problem. "I thought Geronda, he told me, that if I buy her whatever she asks, I will help her, because she will be happy and will forget her worry for her disability. Yes, but how can I do that? I have five more kids, who get jealous, because they can't understand". "What is this? I tell him. This is a false consolation; it is not a solution. If you buy her now whichever dress she asks, a few years later she will ask you to buy her a Mercedes. How are you going to manage? Then she will hear that

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some people have airplanes on their terrace and she will ask you to buy her an airplane! What will you do then? Try to help your child to be happy because she has one eye; to feel that she is a Martyr. In many Martyrs, they took out their eyes, they cut out their ears, their nose, and the people laughed at them. These ones though, while they suffered from the pain and the mocking of the people, they didn't retreat and tolerated unshakably the martyrdom. If the child understands and faces with doxology his disability, God will rank her among the Confessors. Is it not a small thing God to economize so as to remove the eye of the child in such a way, without feeling the pain, and to rank her among the Confessors. She does not have any sins to pay off, as a result she will have net salary out of this disability". He thanked me the poor man, and went away in peace. Indeed, he helped his little girl to understand that her disability is a blessing from God and that she should glorify God. Thus, she grew up naturally, studied literature and now she is working as a teacher and enjoys life more than the other girls who have everything and are tormented because they have not understood the inner meaning of life.

When the people don't understand the inner meaning of life, they are tortured even by the blessings and the opportunities that God offers for their salvation. While he who takes a right stand, enjoys everything. Even if he is limping, he enjoys it. Even if he is not so keen, he enjoys it. Even if he is poor, he enjoys it.

I understand, of course, how many difficulties the invalid people go through, and I pray for them a lot and even more for the girls. For a boy the disability is not so troublesome, for a girl, though, who wants to get married, it is very difficult.

Especially the blind, how much difficulty they are in! The

poor people they can't be self-served; when they walk, they stumble… In my prayer I ask God to give the blind a little light at least, so they can somehow be self-served.

-Geronda, myself too, I am worried that I cannot read at least a chapter from the gospel, because I don't see well. You have told us that, if one reads a chapter every day, he is blessed.

-Why worry about that? If you read a few verses or only one word or simply kiss the Gospel, don't you become blessed? Besides, you did not get to know Christ now. Why don't you study mentally all that you have read or heard up to now? The most important thing is the right stand. You should say: "Now God wants me like that; a few years ago He wanted me otherwise". A pious lawyer, in his old age, could not see and he told me once. "Geronda, pray for me, so I can read a little and recognize my beloved persons". "Your beloved ones you can recognize by their voice, I told him. As for the reading, for so many years you were reading. Now, say the Jesus Prayer. It seems now that's what God wants from you". Ever since the poor man felt greater joy than the joy he felt when he was able to see.

The Heavenly salaryfor the disability

When we have some kind of disability, if we are patient and don't grumble, then we have higher salary. Because all the disabled save up. A deaf person has a check in God's savings bank from the deaf ear, a blind from the blind eye, a lame person from a limping leg. It is a great matter! If they strive a little against their psychic passions they are to get also wreaths from God. You see, the war invalids receive pension, but they also receive medals.

He who has beauty, manliness, health, and doesn't fight

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to cut down on his faults, God will tell him: "You enjoyed your goods in life, your manliness! What do I owe you now? Nothing". While whoever has disability-either he was born like that, or he inherited it from his parents, or he acquired it later-must be happy, because he is to receive in the next life. Especially when he is not at fault, he will have net heavenly salary, without deductions. It is not a small thing during a whole life someone not to be able, for example, to stretch his leg, not be able to sit, or not be able to do genuflexions etc. In next life God will tell him: "come, my child, sit down at last eternally and comfortably in this armchair". That's why I say times without number had I been born mentally retarded, blind or deaf, then I would have had to receive from God.

The invalids if the don't grumble, but they glorify God humbly and live near Him, they will have the best place in Paradise. God will rank them among the confessors and the Martyrs, who gave their arms and legs for the love of Christ, and now in Paradise they kiss respectfully forever the hands and the feet of Christ.

-And when, Geronda, someone is, for instance, deaf and grumbler?

-The little children are whining too. God does not pay attention to many things. You see, the good parents love all their children equally, but pay special attention to the weak ones or the crippled. So does God-our good Father-for those of His children who are weak physically or mentally, provided that they have good disposition and they give him the right to intervene in their life.

The mentally retarded children

The mothers who have retarded children, who are making

scenes continuously, who make things dirty, what they are going through, poor women! Martyrdom! I got to know a woman who has a full grown child and she can't manage him, because he is so naughty...! The poor boy takes the phases and smears the walls, the bed-sheets… The mother tidies up, cleans the house, does all the housekeeping, and him turning everything upside down, making everything dirty. The poor woman to hide the detergents and him to find them and drink them! Whole cupboards, he throws down from the balcony. God protected, and no one was killed up to now. And it is not for one day or two. For many years the situation is like this.

-Geronda, can one who is mentally retarded have humility and goodness?

-Of course he can! Here is this child who comes often here in the monastery, he may be mentally retarded but who else, in his right senses, has he got the goodness he has? How many prayers, how many genuflexions he does! When with hernia, I had difficulty in doing genuflexions, his parents told him: "Grandpa is ill, he cannot do genuflexions". "I do them myself", said he, and then he did genuflexions for me and he was soaked in sweat. How much philotimo (self respect, sense of honor and virtue) and nobility he has! Once another child in the neighborhood beat him up and he, after having been beaten, gave him his hand and told him: "so long!". You hear that. Who, in his right mind, does that, even if he has read the Gospel and a lot of spiritual books? Here, a few days ago when his whole family had come to see me, he sat beside me and his sister nearby. When he saw that his little sister sat far away from me, "come near, Grandpa", tells her and had her sit near me. I was deeply touched and gave him benediction a big ivory cross that someone had brought from Jerusalem. When he took it in

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his hands, "Grandma", he said and showed how he is going to place it on the grave of his Grandma! Astonishing! He wants nothing for himself; everything for the others! He will enter triumphantly Paradise, but he will also place his parents in Paradise.

I wish I were in his position, even if I didn't understand things and I wasn't able to talk. Although, God gave me all the goods, I made them useless. In next life, even the theologians will hide in this child's presence. My logic dictates me that the theologian Saints in Heaven will not be in a better position as to the knowledge of God than these kids.

Maybe, the righteous God will give them something additionally, because here they lived in deprivation.

Psychic illnesses

-Geronda, when someone becomes sad what must he do to overcome this?

-He needs divine consolation

-And how is he going to get it?

-He ought to hook himself on Christ and He will give it to him. Many times philotimo is mixed with egoism. The majority of schizophrenics are very sensitive souls. A trivial thing happens to occur or something which they cannot cope with, and they suffer very much. Somebody else kills a human being as though nothing happens, whereas a sensitive person, if he steps on the leg of a kitten by mistake, he suffers. And if he cannot sleep for two or three nights, then of course he will run to the doctors.

-Geronda, Psychology dictates that in order for a psychopath to be helped, the cause must be erased.

-Yes, if there is a cause. Because sometimes, while some things are natural, are justified somehow, people go through thoughts that lead them to insanity. "Is it likely that I have something hereditary? Could it be I am not well?", they say. I met a young fellow who was a student; he studied eleven hours out of twenty-four and earned scholarships. He was also helping his family, because his father was sick. At the end he got tired, because he was sensitive. He had persistent headaches, and with great effort he earned his diploma. Then he had thoughts that it was hereditary. How could it be hereditary? Even if one studies eleven hours a day, he will suffer from overstrain, let alone to help his parents and being sensitive too.

-Geronda, a child presented a kind of melancholia after the suicide of his father. Could it be hereditary?

-The kid may have been hurt psychologically. It is not certain that it is hereditary. Also we don't know the state his father was in and he committed suicide. Of course, a child, whose father is by nature introvert, needs help. Because, If the child continues also to be introvert-he has also the logism that it may be something hereditary-he may get sick. God allows a man to be tempted as much as he can endure, but the derisions by the people are added, whereupon the soul moans out of the extra burden. The mad people are driven completely insane by other people. At he beginning the insanity can be economized. In the old days, there were no mental Hospitals and if someone was insane, they enclosed him in a room with iron bars! There was one, Peristero was her name, whom they had kept enclosed in the house! The kids were throwing stones at her, were mocking her. She was going wild, the poor woman, she was pulling the iron bars, was shouting and threw outside whatever was at hand. In next life you will see Peristero to surpass many sensible

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ones.

I remember another case too. There was a family of which the elder daughter was a little retarded, but she had a lot of kindness. She was forty years old but she behaved like a five year old. Once, her parents left her behind to cook and they went to the fields. Her brother would come from the field to bring the corn, and he would take the food back to the field for their parents and the workers to eat. She picked zucchinis, eggplants, and green beans, and had them ready for the kettle. Her younger sister, who was a teaser, pulls the donkey from the ear and makes it eat everything! Let the poor woman go and pick up others again. And she didn't say a word. Before getting them ready again, her brother came, at the moment she was putting them on the fire. He unloaded the animals and when he saw that the food was not ready he gave her a beating! What a hardship she was going through everyday! Her unfortunate mother was begging God her daughter to die first and then herself, because she was thinking as to who would look after her. Indeed, the daughter died first, and then the mother

However, the ones who are not healthy in mind are better than many others. They are unfit to plead and without any exams, they pass on to next life.

The right stand of the parents for the disability of their children

There are mothers who, if it is ascertained during pregnancy that the child which they are going to bring into life will be disabled or mentally retarded, they undergo abortion and kill it. They don't take under consideration that it, also, has soul. How many fathers come and tell me: "My own child to be spastic. Why did God make it like that? I cannot bear

it.". How much impertinence towards God this approach has, how much stubbornness and egoism. Another time a student, who had become mentally ill because of thoughts, came to my hut with his father; they had put him through electroshock therapy. The unfortunate child had been pressed very much by his family. He had also such a piety! He did genuflexions and hit his head down on the ground. "Lest God would feel sorry for the ground, he used to say, and then feel sorry for me that I hit it". That is, perhaps God will feel sorry for the ground, which felt pain from his own hitting, and then feel sorry for him too. I was really impressed! He considered himself unworthy. Whenever he was under strain, he used to come to the Holy Mountain. I sorted out his logisms(thoughts form he was O.K. for one or two months, and then the same again. His father did not want his acquaintances to see the child, because his reputation would be offended. He suffered from his egoism. "I am exposed to the people because of my son". He told me. When the child heard that, tells him: "Hey, be humble. I am crazy and move about freely. Are you going to put me in moulds? Keep in mind that you have a crazy kid and move about freely. Are you the only one who has a crazy kid?". I wondered: "Which one of the two is now crazy?".

Do you see where egoism leads sometimes? A father even to wish the catastrophe of his child! And out in the world when I was, I knew one who was mentally retarded, whom his relatives, whenever they would go in the company of others, they would not take him with them, out of shame. They were mocking me too, because I condescended to talk with him. However, I had him in a better position in my heart, than I had them.

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CHAPTER 4

Manipulation in spiritual life

The inner meaning of life

Getting ready for the next life

Geronda a young man disappeared after leaving a note to his parents that he will commit suicide, because he is not handsome and this is their fault.

-The people have not grasped the inner meaning of life. They don't believe in next life. All this torment starts from there. "I am hard done by, he tells you; the others are happy, I am not". They are not pleased with what they have, egoism comes in, and they suffer. God loves all the cosmos. He gave Every person whatever it is good for his benefit, whether it is his height or his courage or his looks etc., whatever will help him, if he exploits it, to be saved. But the people are suffering. "Why myself am I like this, while he is like that?". But you have these, he has other things. A Romanian, Holy Fool, who is an ascetic in the Holy Mountain, said to someone who had such thoughts. "A frog saw a buffalo and said: "I want myself too, to become a buffalo". The frog got bigger and bigger until finally it burst out. God created this one a frog, that one a buffalo. The frog tried to become a buffalo and burst!". Everyone should be happy with the way God created him.

When a person is helped to believe in God and in the future life, the eternal-he understands the inner meaning of

life- and to repent, to change his way of life, there comes, immediately, the Divine consolation with God's Grace, which transforms him, sending away all his hereditary vices. Many people who repented, they strived with philotimo humbly, they were bestowed divine Grace, became Even Saints, and now we bow with reverence and ask their mediation, while before they had many passions and hereditary faults. The venerable Moysis of Ethiopia for instance, while he was the most cruel robber, with hereditary malice, as soon as he believed in God, he repented, became an ascetic, all his passions went away, God' Grace visited him, and deserved to receive the prophetic charisma.. He surpassed in sensitivity even the Great Arsenios[1], who was from the greatest aristocratic family of Rome, with hereditary virtues and great scientific education.

-Geronda, please explain what is exactly the meaning of this life?

- What is it? Getting ready for our homeland, the Heaven, the Paradise. The main thing for man is to perceive the inner meaning of life, which is the salvation of the soul. When a man believes in God and in the future life, then he understands that this life is futile and prepares his passport for the next life. We forget that we all will go away. We are not going to grow roots here. This life is not for our well-being. It is for giving tests, in order to pass in the next life. That's why our aim must be to get ready, so we may leave with clean conscience, when God calls us, and fly near Him. When God blessed the five loafs and fed so many thousands

1 Avas Arsenios the Great (354-447) was from Rome. He was great in wisdom and virtue. He was named "father of Kings", because the Emperor Theodosius assigned the education of his children to him. In 394, following a divine call became an ascetic in the desert of Egypt. Although he lived in the palace he was distinguished for his austerity and hard ascetic life.

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of people, the world one plus one said: "He is a must for a king!". They ate the five loafs and the 2 fishes and got enthusiastic. Christ, though, told them not to be interested in this food, because we are not going to stay here[2]. In this life everyone is tried out, if he responds to all these that God asks.

-Geronda, what must one have in mind, in order to materialize the will of God?

-He should have god in his mind. He should think of the reason why we came in this life. We did not come here to do everything and to make ourselves comfortable. We came to get ready for the next life. So, our minds must be always there and to what is going to help us to go there. With conscientious approach, with humble and conscientious struggle one understands the meaning of spiritual life. The spiritual life is manliness, a spiritual feast. Do you know what feast means? It means to perceive the inner meaning of asceticism, the Monastic nobility, the sensitivity of the Fathers. The inner meaning of life- not of the Monasticism but of life-all the people have the obligation to understand it. If they did that, they would not have any pettiness, grumblings etc.... As there is Divine consolation, we should care how we will make some profit for there, and not how we will have here our dignity and how we will enjoy human honors. When a man places himself in the real life, he enjoys everything. He is happy he is alive, he is happy he will die.. Not because he is fed up of life, but he is happy that he will die and he will go near Christ.

-Is he happy Geronda, because he does not react to that which God allows?

-He is happy, because he sees that this life is temporary, while the next is eternal. He is not tired of life, but he thinks

2 See John 6, 5

"what are we going to do, won't we die?". And he gets ready for there, because he understands that this is his destination, the meaning of life.

Here, the poor social workers have goodness, run, work themselves to death for the others. They study Psychology, but with the way they go to help, in some cases they fail. For instance, one goes to console someone who has one leg and the invalid tells her: "You tell me "good morning", with two legs, but me with one". What can she answer? How can she help him with Psychology? If this man is not helped to perceive the inner meaning of life, he cannot be helped with anything. He ought to understand that with this disability which God allowed, if he is not whining, he is to receive saved heavenly salary in next life and be happy. Even if the others walked with four legs, he ought to say: "Thank you, my God that I can walk with one leg". But the ones who do not have spiritual training, they go to console ill people and they don't know what to say. One social worker, for instance, goes to console a 35 year old woman with cancer, who has three children. What can she tell her? If this mother is not helped to understand the inner meaning of life, she gets disappointed, because she thinks of what will happen to her children. The same despair the mother has, the social worker also does, if she has not understood something superior, the inner spiritual. If there isn't a prior inner placement of her own self, she cannot help rightly, in order divine consolation to come on the other. So the poor women get tired and physically, but they get also worried, because they cannot help positively. They get tired, that is, twice as much.

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Feeling the goodness as need

Man must feel the good as need, otherwise he will be tormented. And it is not, one can say, that some people they cannot perceive the good as need. I cannot justify that. Even a five year old child can feel the good as need. Let's say a child has fever. The parents call a doctor and he tells them "hold the child tightly" and in a jiff, he gives the child an injection. After that the child, when he sees the doctor again, he starts crying and goes away. If, however, they tell him at the beginning, "look, you are sick, you have fever and you will not be able to go either to school or to go and play, while the other children play, but if you let the doctor to pinch you a little, the fever will go down and then you will be able to go and play", the child immediately will close his eyes and he will stretch his arm by himself. I want to say this. If the child is able to feel the good as need, all the more can do so a grown up.

From the moment a man understands the right thing, the matter is over. Let's say that I tell you "I will throw you out of the window". You understand what that means. Even one retarded in mind understands that if he falls out a window which is high above the ground, he will break his legs. He understands what a cliff is and what is a plain; what is the good and what is the bad. An adult who has read the fathers and the Gospel, he knows which is right. From there on, the knob must be turned. But many times you tell to some souls (to some human beings) "why do you do this? Don't you understand it is not right?", and they begin: "There, unfortunately that's the way I am, why am I like that, I was like that before". "Forget what you were before. Now that I explain it to you, what do you do to correct yourself?". It's another story if someone is not sharp. But only the baby

will catch a charcoal instead of a sweet, because his mind is not sharp yet.

-Geronda, how did your mother, who was so sensitive and loved you so much, gave you from the early childhood years so much austere upbringing.

-From the early childhood man can be helped to understand the inner meaning of life and be happy the right way. When I was young, I outran the other children in a race.. The other children did not let me run, they used to send me away. "Little refugee", they called me. I was running to my mother in tears. "Why are you crying?" she asked. "The children don't let me run", I responded. "You want to run? Here is a yard, run. Why do you want to run there, in order the others to see you and tell you bravo? This has pride". Another time I wanted to play ball and the children did not let me. I went again to my mother in tears. "What happened, why are you crying again?", she asked. "The children don't let me play with the ball!", I answered. "We have a big yard; you have a ball, play here. What do you want, the others to see you, this contains pride". Then I thought: "My mother is right". Thus, little by little I didn't want either to run or play ball in front of people, because I understood that it was out of pride and said to myself: "Indeed, what a thing! She is right". After that I did not mind so much when I saw the other children running, kicking the ball and priding themselves. I was laughing and said: "What are they doing?", and I was a little child, in third grade of elementary school. After that I lived a normal life. So now if they tell me "what do you prefer, to climb the Mount Athos in the month of August shoeless on yew leaves or to go to a ceremony where they will put on me a cloak etc.", I will say that I prefer to climb shoeless the Mount Athos. Not out of humility, but because this comforts me.

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The people who have pride were not helped when they were young by the family. The secular mentality torments people. If this is not taken care and the parents don't help their children when they are young, this becomes a permanent state. It is one thing to praise a child a little, so he doesn't get disappointed, and another thing to boost his egoism. E.g. the child recited a poem and did not say it well, and gets disappointed. Then his mother will tell him: "Hey, you said it nicely,". If he says it well, though, and his mother starts saying in front of others "bravo, you said it better than the other children! My child is the best.!", this is bad. That's how the parents many times cultivate pride in their children. Or the child, for instance, gets into a mischief at school and the teacher scolds him. Then he goes home and tells his parents: "The teacher reprimanded me unjustly". When the father or mother supports the child and says especially in front of him " will show him, my own child is…", then the child believes that what he did was good, and finally is tormented by futile things. The basic thing is, the child to understand certain things from his home. If a man perceives the inner meaning of life from an early age, Everything goes well afterwards. Otherwise the child is pleased with the earthly, with the praises of the people- which in reality they don't offer rest-and stays an earthly man.

Helping people to repent

-Geronda, if repentance was taught to the people, only this could help. We should read as much as we can, the lives of Saints that stress repentance, in order to be helped. Asking repentance from God means that we seek enlightenment. When we seek repentance and we repent more, of course

we will be humiliated more, and then unavoidably it will come more the Divine Grace, the divine enlightenment. When a man is in a state of repentance, he preserves the Grace of God. However the people are good. You see, most people they neither confess nor go to church, they have great ignorance, but on the other side they come and ask me for help. This act hides something inside.

-Could it be, Geronda, that the trials become the pretext for the people to approach God?

The ones who have good disposition are helped by the trials; the ones who no not have, they turn against God, swear etc. The bad thing is that they don't say "I have sinned", but they are tormented. Devil has got great authority on the world. We have given him many rights. What has become of today's mankind! The bad thing is that man hinders the Divine intervention, because he has no repentance. If there had been repentance, things would have been settled. Bad times, bad times we will go through! May God help us! We should ask repentance for the whole world, and especially for the ones who, in cold blood, harm the Church and they have no intention to be corrected, may God give them repentance first and then take them away.

We ought to - as much as we can - help people to repent, so we may receive God's blessings. Repentance and confession, that's what is needed today. Myself continuously I recommend repentance and confession, in order devil to lose his rights, to be cut off the external devilish influences. People need to be shaken, in order to understand, to repent. For instance, someone confesses that he committed adultery. His spiritual Father absolves him, he gives him also a canon and he does not go any further. The spiritual Father must help him to understand that the bad thing was not only the adultery; that with what he did, he committed crimes, he

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destroyed two families. But certain spiritual Fathers neither investigate further, nor give the people cause for thought.

-Geronda, there are people who are good, but they don't go to church often, they don't have a regular mystic life.

-Sometimes, someone may not go to church often, but inside him there is piety, goodness, and so God finds room to reside. This kind of people, if they lived a mystic life, they would progress a lot in spiritual life. You see, there are other people who go to church, confess, receive Holy Communion, they do everything, and despite of all these God doesn't find room to reside in them, because there is no humility, goodness, real repentance. It's not enough to confess to a spiritual Father in order for someone to be straightened out; repentance also is needed. And every prayer one says must begin with confession to God. It is not right, though, to say "I am so and so", and then to do the same things. This is not awareness. When there is awareness of what one is doing, there is also and improvement.

Did you see the Israelis with what simplicity they prayed? << *Rouse Thyself, why sleepest Thou, o Lord?*[3], they said. That is "wake up, Lord why are you sleeping?". And then the Lord << *awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine. And he put his adversaries to rout....* >>[4]. With what simplicity and what humility, but also with what outspokenness they said: "What are we going to say now our Lord to the nations? You saved us in the Red Sea, and now we will die in the desert or will the aliens slaughter us? Don't let us make a fool of ourselves"[5]. We must not say such talk, "why are you sleeping God, and You don't see?". Because God will give us a slap on the face. It is impertinence. They

3 Psalms 44, 23
4 Psalms 77, 65-66
5 Exod. 32, 12 -Deuter. 9,28 & Psalms 78, 10

(the Israelis) with humility and simplicity they said it. They did not lay the blame on God, they may have said "why did You act so?", but they said "we deserved many more misfortunes, but now what will we tell to the nations?". And you saw; one plus one they broke His resistance. Do you understand? There was recognition of their fault, there was repentance and God intervened and "*put to rout…*". If we find ourselves in difficulty and we don't face it spiritually, then the secular people will say for us: "Where is your prayer? You say that you pray, but what are you doing?". We make a fool of ourselves.

Repentance helps to wipe out evil

When we ask for repentance from God for the people, we should include ourselves in the ones who are at fault and we should not say: "Help the people who are sinful". The three boys were born in captivity, in spite of that they did not say "is it our fault?", but said "we suffered justly; we should have suffered even more". They talked as though they were from those who contravened the commands of God before the Babylonian captivity, as though they were participants in the sin, while they did not participate, since they had not been born yet. How much the prayer which they said when they were in the furnace moves me! "*You punish us justly, Lord, because we have sinned, but only for the sake of Abraham whom you love, because he did not sin, don't abandon us*". They included themselves in the sinners, and they believed it, that's why the furnace turned into coolness, while the idolater who went to see the furnace, was touched by the flames[6]. If someone does not work like this, he starts to justify himself continuously.

6 See Daniel 3-11 prayer & hymn of the three lads

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"Devil made me sin", or "Adam is the cause, or Eva is the cause; it is not my fault". A theologian told me once: "Why are we indebted now to suffer because of Eva?". "Blessed man, I tell him, does this hinder you to be saved?". Are poor Adam and miserable Eva responsible? One mistake they made and they were for so many centuries in Hades, while Christ came for us and redeemed us. "Seventy times if you sin and repent, I shall forgive you"[7]. Thousands of times we sin and Christ forgives us-provided we repent sincerely; and we go around saying that Adam and Eva are responsible? And you see they don't use the name Eva – to name a sister with the name Eva or at least Zoi (Life) if it is difficult the name Eva! She is hard done by! She is our mother, the mother of the whole world and we don't even want to hear her name. And the curse, in essence, was given to the devil, by God "And the serpent was prudent"[8]. The devil entered in the serpent, in order to deceive the human creature. And you see, everyone is against Eva, that it is she who ruined us, while we would be in Paradise if the violation did not take place! If Christ would tell us also, "since you are at fault once, you will be for so many centuries in Hades", eh, then one could say something!... What an ungrateful world!

However repentance is a great matter. We have not understood that with repentance the decision of God can be changed. It is not a minor thing for man to have such power. Do you do something wrong? God gives you a little slap. You say "I've sinned"? He stops and gives you blessings. When, that is, the naughty child comes to his senses, repents and is beaten up by conscience, then his father caresses him with love and consoles him. The Israelis, because they had disobeyed the commands of God, they lived in captivity

7 Math. 18, 22
8 Gen 3, 1

for 75 years. And finally, when they repented, King kyros appeared, for whom one can say that he turned out better than the sons of Israel, who had infected the sanctuaries they had for sacrifices. God changed kyros mind and made him believe in the God of Heaven. So he set the Israelis free, he gave them money, wood for the church, he built the wall of Jerusalem and showed such goodness and reverence, that somehow not even the Israelis had shown[9]. And all these happened, because the populace repented and changed[10]. How much repentance does help to annihilate the evil!

Read all the books of Maccabeus. They are very important. What order had the King given? The elephants to stamp the Israelis out! The others went, they prepared the ceremony, they gave the 500 elephants to drink strong wine with incense, in order to drive them wild, and waited for the King to appear, in order to start the ceremony. Burt the King had forgotten the order he gave. The chief for the elephants goes to notify the King, because he had not appeared yet. "Your Highness, we are awaiting for you. Everything is ready: the elephants, the Judeans, the guests are waiting". "Who told you to do such things?", tells him! Shouting, threats….. . And this did not happen once but three times[11]. Is it a small thing for a king to forget the order he had given himself? And not only this, but finally he changed his stand completely towards the Judeans. All the secret lies there: The cosmos to repent.

-Geronda, do the peace Associations, which are established by various nations, help for the peace in the world?

-It depends. Some start with good disposition. However, when they gather magicians, fire worshippers, Protestants,

9 See B' Ezra 1,1 and next
10 see Ezra 8, 88-92
11 See Macc. 5. 1-35

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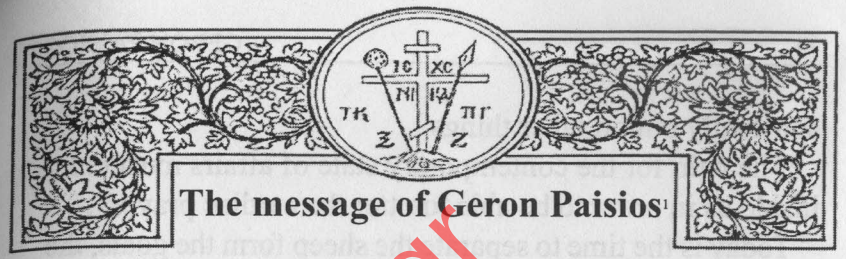
this lot, it doesn't make any sense-how can they help to bring peace in the world? God forgive me, these are rags of the devil. How can it be peace by a sinful Association? How can peace come when the people are not reconciled with God? Only when man reconciles with God, internal and external peace comes. In order for man to reconcile with God, he must come to his senses, to repent, to live according to the commands of God, and then comes the grace and the peace of God inside him, so he can offer help for peace and around him.



The message of Geron Paisios[1]

First we believe in God and then we love God and his image, the human being. Faith increases with prayer. "Add to us faith" >>

"As I understand it, all the evil results from unfaithfulness. When man does not believe in God, he wants to enjoy life. That's why he goes in for every kind of sin".

"Man must perceive the inner meaning of life, that this life is given to be prepared for the next. From there on, as one who travels needs a guide, so for the heavenly trip, he must find a guide (a Spiritual Father). Then, he (the Spiritual Father) will put him in a program, a bit of study, a bit of prayer, to evade causes of sin and the secular beliefs which are the worst of all. That way, his heart will be with Christ".

We must strive with sense of honor to save ourselves, in order not to make Christ be sad. Christ will tell us: "My son, I did so many things to save you. I shed my blood and endured so many passions, you what did you do to save yourself?"

"Every man must find and hallow his inclination. The industrious person, wherever is his post, either in marriage or in Monasticism, he will be successful".

"We should prefer sorrows and we should accept them better than the joys. The bitter medicine is many times better than the sweet, because it cures. The real happiness is brought forth by pain".

"What hinders people in their spiritual progress is the fact that he does not put his mind to work on what benefits him

1 Instead of an epilogue some important points of the teachings of Geron Paisios are quoted.

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spiritually but on other things".

"The pain for the contemporary state of affairs must enter inside us in order to be able to utter the cardiac prayer".

"Today is the time to separate the sheep form the goats, the faithful from the unfaithful. Later, the time will come when we will undergo examinations, we will endure persecutions for our faith, and then copper will be separated from gold".

"When someone worries because he suffers for other people, he feels sympathy for them, he makes their problems his own then he has the salary of a martyr. The people who sacrifice everything how graceful they are! They have no problems and their face shines because they have continuously the Divine joy"

"The whole basis of the spiritual life is to think of the others and leave yourself last, not to consider yourself. When we put ourselves in the shoes of others and we understand them, then we get related to Christ".

"The Grace of God is an expensive thing. In order to reside in a person, this person must be spiritually in accordance with God and must exercise (exhaust) all his humane powers. On the contrary we want the divine grace to come and rid us of the weaknesses, without struggle. In order for the Holy Spirit to come and reside in a human being, there must be a lot of altruism, high sense of honor, humility, nobility sacrifice. The spiritual life is not enjoyment. Christ has provided the electrical socket, but our cables are rusted and don't accept the Divine Grace. We must remove the rust from the cables, we must strive to get to know ourselves, to get rid of our passions, to acquire virtues and then the Grace of God will visit us". To Him belong the might and the glory in the eons. Amen."

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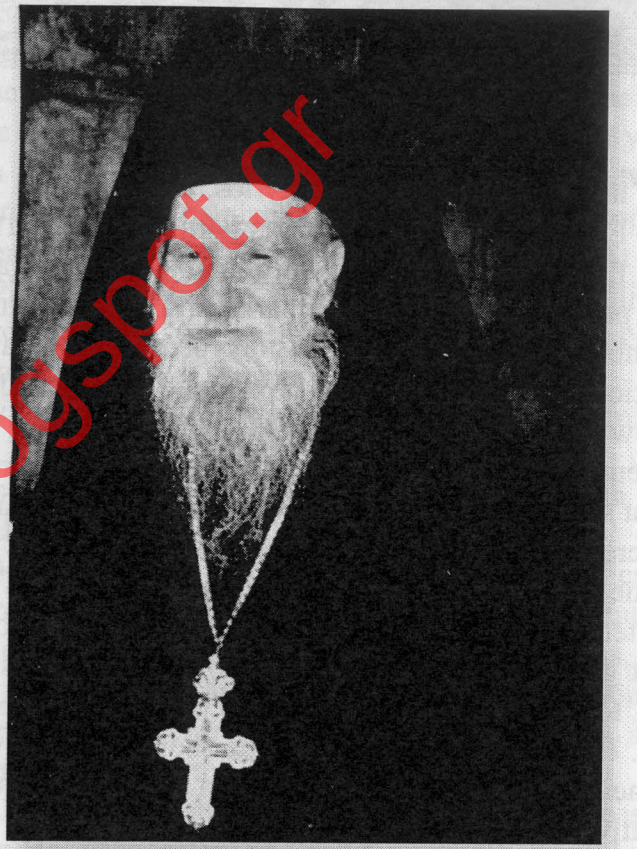

ABOUT ILLNESS

Geron Porfyrios

"I feel the illness as love of Christ"

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SHORT BIOGRAPHY

The venerable Geron Porfyrios, in the world named Evangelos Bairachtaris, was born on Feb. 7, 1906, in Evoia, in the village of Snt John-province of Karystos. His parents, Leonidas Bairachtaris and Eleni, nee Antoniou Lambrou, were pious and Godly people. His Father in particular, was a chanter in the village and he had got to know personally St. Nektarios. His family was large and his parents, poor farmers, they had difficulty to support them. That's why the father was forced to leave for America, where he worked in the construction of the Panama Canal.

The young evangelos was the fourth child of the family. He tended sheep in the mountains and had attended only the first grade of the elementary school, when he was forced too, to go to Chalkida to work. He was barely seven years old. He worked for 2-3 years in a shop. Then, he went to Piraeus where he worked for 2 years in a grocery store of a relative.

When he was twelve years old, he left secretly for the Holy Mountain, with the ardent wish to imitate Saint John kaliviti, whose life he had read in the old days and whom he had specially loved. God's grace led him to the hut of St Georgios kausokalivitis, and the submission to two Gerontes, brothers by birth, of Pandeleimon, who was a confessor, and of Ioannikios. He devoted himself to the two Gerontes who, by general confession were especially strict, with great love and with spirit of absolute submission.

He became a monk at the age of fourteen and was given the name Nikitas. Two years later became Great Schema Monk. A little later God granted him the visionary charisma.

At the age of 19, Geron Porfyrios became seriously ill, a fact that forced him to desert the holy Mountain permanently. He returned then, to Evoia, where he moved into the Monastery of Snt Charalambos Leukon. A year later, in 1926, at the age of 20, he was ordained as priest in the church of Saint Charalambos, Kymis by Archibishop of Sina Porfyrio 3rd, who gave him the name Porfyrios. At the age of 22, he became spiritual Father-Confessor and a little later Archimandrite. For a period of time he served as priest in Tsakaious, a village in Evoia.

In Evoia, he lived in the Holy Monastery of St Charalambos for 12 years, serving people as spiritual Father and Confessor, and for 3 years he lived in Ano Vatheia, in the deserted Monastery of St Nikolas.

In 1940, in the eve of the Second World War, Geron Porfyrios was settled in Athens, where he assumed duties as a Priest and Confessor in the Polycliniki of Athens. As he used to say himself, he lived there for 33 years as though they were one day, exercising tirelessly spiritual task and relieving the pain and the illness of the people.

Since 1955 he had settled at Kalisia, where he had leased from the Holy Monastery of Pendelis a small church built there and the surrounding farmland; he cultivated the land with great diligence, and in parallel he practiced his rich spiritual work.

In the summer of 1979, he was settled in Milesi with the dream to build a Monastery, There, he lived at first in a caravan under especially adverse conditions and later in a modest small cell, made of cement blocks, where he endured the many trials of his health without complaining. In 1984, he moved to a section of the Monastery-under construction, for the completion of which he worked incessantly and indefatigably despite the fact that he was very ill and blind.

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Upon the foundation of Katholiko of the Monastery of Transfiguration, on February 26, 1990, he lived to see his dream come true.

In the last years of his earthly life he was getting ready for his demise. He desired to retire in the Holy Mountain in his beloved Kausokalyvia, where secretly and quietly, the same way he lived, he would offer his soul to its Bridegroom. Many times they heard him saying: << I aspire, and now that I am old, to go and die up there >>.

Actually, the blessed end occurred in Kausokalyvia, in his hut, in the morning of Dec. 2, 1991.

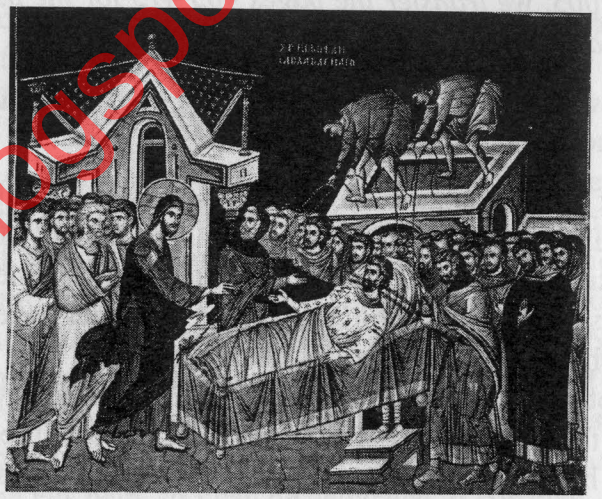
The last words heard from his mouth were from the Archieratic prayer of the Lord-those words that so much he loved and he frequently repeated: "In order to become one"

In the difficult times we live in we have great need of evidence for the church, alive and true evidence, which is testified by people who have experienced the truth, the faith and the love of Christ in a cordial, personal and practical way.

The word of the Holy Fathers and Mothers, which emanates from the authentic ecclesiastical experience, comforts and guides, dissolves illusions, assures the heart, supports the conscience, revives faith, and opens horizons and roads to eternal life and to the blessed kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as it is experienced in the Orthodox liturgy and worship.

Word of Saintly Father is the word of late Geron Porfyrios, the prophet, the solemn, the humble, the simple and ardent, whose life was pure and authentic testimony for Christ, for His truth and His joy. He was the man who supported a multitude of people with his advice and his admonitions, in difficult times of illness, mourning, grief, defection and death.

The blessed Geron Porfyrios is the God bearing Father of our days, the pure Priest and teacher, who fell in love in an ascetic way with Christ and served authentically the people. His teaching is deeply permeated by the morality and theology of the Orthodox Church and dominates in it the face and the icon of Christ, the Savior of us all.



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ABOUT ILLNESS

(From the excellent book "Life and Words" that was published by the Holy Monastery of Crhysopigi-in Chania, Crete-2003, we transfer the pages 463-475 for the psychic benefit of the readers of this issue).

My Christ, your love has no limits

I thank God, who gave me many illnesses[1]. Many times I tell Him: "My Christ, Your love has no limits!". How I am still alive, it is a miracle. Among the other illnesses I have also cancer in the pituitary gland. An ulcer developed there which grows and presses the optical nerve. That's why I cannot see any more. I feel terrible pain. I pray, however, to bear the Cross of Christ with patience. Have you seen my tongue how it is? It has become bigger; it is not the same as before. This is also from the cancer I have in my head. The way it goes, I will get worse. As this thing will grow more, I will have difficulty in speaking. I feel great pain, I suffer, but my illness is very nice. I feel it as love coming from Christ. I feel devoutness and thank God. It is for my sins. I am a sinner and God tries to purify me.

When I was sixteen years old, I prayed to god to give me a serious disease, a cancer, in order to bear pain for his love

1 The reverend Geron Porfyrios suffered of the following illnesses: Myocardial infarction (prosthiodiaphragmatic with lateral ischemia), chronic renal failure, ulcer of duodenum (with repeated gastrorrhagies), operated cataract, (with rejection of the lens and blindness), herpes zoster on the face, staphylococcal-dermatitis on the hand, inguinal hernia (with frequent constriction), chronic bronchitis, adenoma of pituitary gland. See Georiou Papazachou (+2001), gathering 41, January-March 1992, p.93.

and glorify Him through pain. For a long time I practiced this prayer. But my Geron told me that this is egoism and that way I blackmail God. God knows what to do. So, I did not continue the prayer. See, though, that God did not forger my petition and gave me the benefaction so many years later!

Now I don't pray to God to take away from me that which I asked from Him. I am glad that I have it, in order to share myself too His passions, out of my great love for Him. I have the education of God. *" For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves"*[2]. My sickness is a special favor from God, who calls upon me to enter the sacrament of His love so that I can try with His own grace to reciprocate. But myself, I am not worthy. You are going to say: "All these which God reveals to you, don't they make you worthy?". All these they reprove me. Because all these are of God's Grace. Nothing is of my own. God granted me many charismata, but myself I didn't live up to them, I proved unworthy. I didn't stop the attempt, however, not even a moment.. Perhaps God will give me His help, so I can be dedicated to His love.

That's why I don't pray , so as God may cure me. I pray to make me good (the right sort of stuff). I am sure that God knows that I am in pain. I pray, though, for my soul, so as he may forgive my misdeeds. I don't take medicine, nor I underwent any operation, nor any medical examinations, and I will not accept any operation either. I will let God to arrange things. The only thing I do is to try to be good. That's what you must wish for me. God's grace keeps me up. I try to be dedicated to Christ, to approach Him, to be united with Christ. This is what I desire, I have not achieved it, though – I don't say this out of humiliation. However, I don't lose my courage. I persist.. I pray to God to forgive

2 Hebrew 12, 6

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my sins. I've heard many people say: "I cannot pray". This has not happened to me. Only the day of my disobedience in the Holy Mountain occurred to me.

It does not concern me how long or if I will live. I entrust this to God's love. It happens many times someone not to want to remember death. It is because he prefers life. From one point of view this is an indication of the immortality of the soul. However, *"if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord"*[3]. Death is a bridge that will lead us to Christ. When we close our eyes, we will open them in eternity. We will appear in front of Christ. In next life we will live "more obviously" the grace of God.

I felt great happiness with the thought of my meeting the Lord

Once I had reached the brink of death[4]. I had suffered serious gastrorrhagy because of the cortisone that they gave me in the hospital, when I underwent operation in the eye, which I finally lost. Then I lived in a small hut; the monastery had not been built yet. Out of exhaustion, I did not perceive whether it was day or night. I reached the point of death, however I survived. I lost a lot of weight. I lost my appetite. For three months I lived with 3 spoonfuls of milk a day. I was saved by a goat.

I lived with the thought of passing away. I felt great happiness with the thought I would meet our Lord. I had deeply inside me the sense of God's presence. Then God wanted to reinforce and console me with something highly blessed. Every time I felt that my soul would go out, I saw, in the sky, a blinking star which shed around very sweet

3 Romans 14, 8
4 It occurred in 1983

rays. It was bright and very sweet. It was very beautiful! Its light had a lot of sweetness. It had a marine color, light sky bleu, like a diamond, like a precious stone. Every time I saw it, I was filled with comfort and happiness, because inside this star I felt that it was the whole Church, the Triune God, the Virgin Mary, the Angels, the Saints. I had the feeling hat there were all my people there, the souls of my beloved ones, of my Gerondes.. I believed that, when I would depart from this life, there in this star I would go too, owing to the love of God, not out of my virtues. I wanted to believe that God, who loves me, He revealed it, in order to tell me: "I am waiting for you".

I did not want to think about hell, the goblins. I didn't remember my sins, although I had many. I left them behind. I remembered only the love of God and I rejoiced. And I prayed: "For Your love, my God, let me be there too. If, though, for my sins I must go to hell, let Your love put me wherever wishes. As long as I am with You". For so many years I lived in the desert with loves towards Christ. I kept saying to myself: << If you go up in Heaven and God tells you: *"Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? What do you want here?"*[5], I will tell Him: "Whatever You wish my Lord, whatever Your love wants, wherever Your love wants to place me. I surrender to Your love. Even if You want to put me in hell, do so, provided that I 'm not deprived of Your Love" >>.

I was aware of my sinfulness; that's why I kept saying silently the prayer of St Symeon the New Theologian:
"I know, Savior, that no one else but me did you wrong, neither committed the actions which I worked. But this again I know, that neither the extent of my faults nor the multitude of my sins surpasses the great longanimity and

5 Math. 22, 12

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the extreme philanthropy of my God"[6].

What the prayer says are not words of our own. We cannot conceive and express such words. They were written by Saints. However what the Saints wrote, our soul should adopt and feel them and experience them. I like, also, the next part of the prayer:

"You don't miss, my God, my Creator, my Savior, neither dripping of tears, nor tiny part of dripping. My unprocessed actions Your eyes know, in Your book, and the never acted deeds happen to be recorded. See my humiliation, see my so much labor! And my sins all forgive, God of the Universe....".

This prayer I repeated continuously with great longing, in order to pass away having these logisms(thoughts). The more I repeated it, the more the star, my consolation, appeared up there in the infinity. There appeared all these days I was in pain. And when it appeared, my soul was floating and I was saying silently: "My star came!". I felt that it was pulling me to go to it leaving the earth behind. I felt great happiness when I was looking at it. I didn't want to think about my sins, as I told you,, because they would drive me out of this Holy Mystery. Only one time, only once, I sensed it empty, it was not twinkling, it was not full. I understood. It was from Satan. I disregarded it, I turned elsewhere, and I talked to my sister about chores. After awhile I saw it twinkling intensely. Happiness came back again inside me more vividly.

All this time I had terrible pain in my whole body. The others saw that I was passing away. I had surrendered to God's love. I did not pray to God to relieve me of the pain. My longing was God to have mercy on me. I had leaned upon Him; I expected His grace to act. I was not afraid of

6 Liturgy of Holy communion, z' prayer, Simeon the New Theologian

death. To Christ I would go. As I said, I kept repeating the prayer of St Simeon the New Theologian, but without self-interest, not to be given my health. I felt every word of it.

The secret in sickness is to struggle in order to acquire the Grace of God

A lot of benefit we have out of the illnesses, provided we bear them without moaning and we glorify God, asking of his mercy. When we get sick, it is not the point whether we will get medicine or whether we shall go to pray to St Nektarios. We must know the other secret also; to strive to acquire the Grace of God. That is the secret. The rest will be taught to us by the Grace, that is, how we will abandon ourselves to Christ. We, that is, disregard the illness, don't think about it, we think of Christ gently, faintly, unselfishly and God will make His miracle for the benefit of our soul.. As we say in the Divine Liturgy, *"our whole life in Christ the God we entrust"*[7].

We must, though, want to defy the illness. If we don't want, it is difficult, we cannot say "we defy it". And so, while we think that we defy it and we don't pay attention to it, we do so, we have it continuously in our mind and we can't have tranquility within us. And I will prove this to you. We say: "I believe that God will cure me. I don't take medicine. That's what I will do. I'll stay awake all night and I'll pray for this matter. God will listen to me". We pray all night, we beg, we ask, we shout, we blackmail God and all the Saints to cure us. We blackmail them day and night. We run here and there. Eh, don't we show with all these that we have not defied the illness? The more we persist and blackmail the Saints and God to become well, the more we live our

7 Small and great synapti, kataliktirios protropi

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illness. The more we care to get rid of it, the more we live it through. That's why nothing happens. And we are under the impression that a miracle will occur; nevertheless, in reality we don't believe in the miracle, and so we don't recuperate.

Prayers we offer, we don't take medicine; however we don't calm down and the miracle doesn't happen. But one is going to say: "I did not take the medicine, how don't I believe?". Despite that, within us there is doubt and fear and we are thinking: "might that happen?". Here applies the odd: *"If you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, "be taken up and cast into the sea," it will be done"*[8]. When faith is real, either you take medicine or not, faith will act. And with doctors and with medicine God takes action. Sophia Syrah says: *"Honor the doctor for his services, for the Lord created him. The Lord has created medicines from the earth, and the sensible man will not disparage them. Then call in the doctor for the Lord created him; do not let him leave you, for you need him"*[9].

The whole secret is faith; indiscreet, soft, simple and naïve. *"In simplicity and naivety of heart"*[10]. It is not a matter of imposition. The "imposition" a magician may have – this word does not sound well. We should have faith that God loves us dearly and that He wants us to become His. That is why He allows the illnesses, until we surrender with confidence to Him.

We should love Christ and everything will change in our life. We should not love him, in order to have retribution, for example, in health. But we should love him yearningly, out of gratitude, without thinking anything, only the divine

8 Math. 21, 21
9 Soph. Syrah 38, 1.4.12
10 wisdom of Solom. 1,1

love. Neither we should pray purposefully and say to God: "Make the so and so healthy, in order to come near You". This is not right, to indicate ways to God. How we could say to God: "Make me well?". To Him who knows everything what can we make known? We will pray, but God may not want to listen to us.

A man asked me a little while ago:

-When will I become well?

-Ah! I tell him. If you say, "when will I become well?", you will never become well. It is not right to ask God for these things. You pray to God with agony to rid you of the illness, but then the illness hugs you and squeezes you more tightly. We must not beg for that. Neither should we pray for that.

He got scared and said:

-Should I not even pray?

-Alas! I told him. You should pray and pray a lot in fact, but in order God to forgive your sins and to give you strength to love Him and to be surrendered to Him. Because the more you ask the illness to go away, the more it sticks on you, it embraces you, it squeezes you and it doesn't get separated from you. If, of course, as a human being, you feel inner difficulty and weakness, then let yourself beg the Lord humbly to take away the illness.

Let yourselves with confidence to the Love of God

When we entrust ourselves to Christ, our mental organism is at peace, as a result all the organs and glands function naturally. Everything is affected. We become well, we stop suffering. Even if we have cancer, if we leave it to God and our soul becomes calm, the Divine Grace may act and drive

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away cancer and all.

If you want to know also, the stomach ulcer is caused by neurosis. The sympathetic system, while it is pressed, is strained and suffers and so the ulcer is created. One, two, three times, strain, strain, strain, worry, worry, worry, stress, stress, stress, pop! Ulcer. Ulcer or cancer, it depends. When in our soul there are confusions, they affect the body and our health does not go well.

The perfect thing is not to pray for our health. Not to wish to get well, but to become good. For myself also that's what I wish, I tell you. Are you listening? Not good, that is virtuous, "to become this, this, this…", but to acquire Divine zeal; to let ourselves with confidence to His Love; to pray rather for our soul. And our soul, we should consider it incorporated within the Church, the head of which is Christ, together with all our fellowmen and with all our brethren in Christ.

Myself too, I open my arms and pray for everyone. In front of the Holy Grail, when I receive the Holy Communion, I open my soul to accept the Lord and I bow my head and pray for you, for him, for the nearby, for the whole Church. That's what you should do. Do you understand? Don't pray for your health. Don't say: "My Lord, make me well". No! But, "my Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", with unselfishness, with love, without expecting anything. "My Lord, whatever wishes Your Love…"; that way only you are going to work from now on, loving Christ and our brothers. Love Christ. Become Saints. Throw yourselves only into His friendship, only into His love, only into His Divine Eros.

Could it be for me also, who I feel this zeal, this worship, doesn't it happen that I do not succumb to sickness nor to cancer, even if I feel my body to be rotten? I must not talk,

but my love for you and for the whole world does not let me keep silent. When I talk, my lungs run out of oxygen and it is highly harmful, because the heart is affected. I suffered something worse than a heart attack. However, I'm still alive. Is this not God's intervention? Yes, me too, I exercise obedience to God's will, to the illness. I endure without complaining and…. with indignation against myself, because *"who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"*[11]. I Am in a bad state, my spirit is sick too.

I say to a Hermit, with whom I am in contact:

-Pray for me. Me I love you! Love me too, and feel sorry for me and pray for me, so God may have mercy on me.

-Eh, you, he tells me, must pray.

-Myself, I tell him, I begin to be short now on all these I was doing for so many years. How does this Hymn go?

"The mind is wounded, the body is softened
the spirit is sick; the word is weakened,
life is deadened, the end is near;
So, wretched soul, what will you do
when the Judge comes to search your deeds"[12]

For me this hymn holds true, in this I see myself. I think that, if I didn't do this and that, I would not be in pain now; I would be closer to Christ. I say this about myself, who I am inconsiderate…….

If you want to be healthy and live for many years, listen to what the wise Solomon says: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by Me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life"*[13]. That's the secret; to acquire this wisdom, this knowledge, and then all will

11 Job 14, 4
12 Grand canon of St Andrew of Crete, a' hymn, of th ode
13 Prov. 9, 10-11

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function well, and everything will be put in order and we will live with health and happiness.

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Ἱερόν παρεκκλήσιον Ὁσίων Ἁγιορειτῶν Πατέρων,
Ὁσίου Ἀρσενίου τοῦ Καππαδόκου καί Γέροντος Παϊσίου
στό χωριό Μαΐστρο Ἀλεξανδρουπόλεως

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